

000

Ministers and officials in the court of the emperor of the Mossi. We shall provide a list of the persons making up the emperor's court in a later chapter.

Functions of the Ministers

645

643
648

The four ministers, Ouidi Naba, Larallé Naba, Gounga Naba, and Baloum Naba, were charged with the nomination of the kombemba (plural of kombéré, vassal chief), subject to the emperor's approval. At the present time they retain the same prerogatives subject to ratification by the administrative authorities. These ministers further assisted the emperor in deciding important matters whenever he called upon them, and they transmitted the orders of the Mogho Naba to [48] his vassals. Today the Mogho Naba is hardly concerned with the regulation of affairs, since these are dealt with by his ministers or by the French authorities. However, the leading court dignitaries always submit to him matters of any importance, they keep him informed about all matters of general interest, and, finally, they report to him any interviews which they may have had with the administrator of the circle, who represents the government of the colony [Ed., the circle (Fr., cercle) is the largest French administrative unit below the colony (Fr., colonie)].

Organization of Territorial Control

634
645

Each of the emperor's ministers had authority -- we shall presently see under what conditions -- over a group of cantons [Ed., the canton (Fr., canton) is a traditional Mossi/administrative unit, containing a number of villages, and several cantons together form a province; the native districts were incorporated into the French administrative system to some extent]. A kombéré naba was head of each canton. Originally and up to the time of Naba Sanum's reign, the Baloum Naba commanded the dimbissi (canton chiefs who were descendants of the recent Mogho Nabas), while the other cantons, except the most thickly populated and hence the richest, such as Zittenga, Manga, etc., were distributed

634 among the other ministers. The rich and important cantons
 645 were entrusted to the Kamsaogo Naba, chief eunuch. This was
 [839] because the emperor wanted to be sure that he would recover
 the fortune left by this minister at his death. Since the latter
 was merely the guardian of the king's wives, he had no legitimate
 heirs. The eunuch appointed to replace him had to establish his
 own personal fortunes. Only the horses or women which the late
 minister might have given [49] during his lifetime to persons in
 his section were left with their owners. [Ed., Mossi villages are
 [62] divided into sections (Fr., quartier), which are really hamlets
 containing several households or compounds. These sections are
 indigenous, not colonial subdivisions.]

Powers of the Ministers over the Vassal Chiefs of the Mogho Naba

634 It would be a mistake to think that before the French occu-
 645 pation the ministers had any great authority over the canton chief.
 642 Actually, the ministers' role, as has been pointed out, was to act
 as intermediaries between the emperor and the canton chiefs.
 They could not, however, under any right or pretext, intervene
 in canton affairs, since the kombéré was the only lord in the area
 whose command had been conferred upon him as an appanage by
 the Mogho Naba.

That is why it has been possible for canton chiefs who were
 dissatisfied with the minister under whose rule they found them-
 selves to report, henceforth, to another minister. Furthermore,
 the Mogho Naba saw no objection to this. The Mossi expression,
 [538] Gansobend'ka sambiri n'tont vigri yé ("hospitality is not like kin-
 ship; you can evade it") amply illustrates the accuracy of the
 foregoing. If it is further noted that before the French occupation
 [657] the naba came to Ouagadougou only once a year to pay their re-
 spects to the emperor and to bring him annual tribute, one will
 readily understand the insignificance of the ministers' authority
 over them.

This does not mean, of course, that it was possible to [50]
 do without any intermediaries, but rather that it was possible to
 choose them freely. In any case, one of the incentives to

634 submission was based solely on the fact that although the em-
645 peror named new canton chiefs, he was too remote to know any-
642 thing about the children of deceased naba, so, in order to make
sure during his own lifetime that his eldest son would succeed
him, the kombéré affected some respect toward the emperor's
ministers and made gifts to the principal dignitaries at Ouagadougou.

631 Present situation. It is my belief that the present political
648 and administrative reorganization, which dates back about eighteen
years (1912), has taken no account whatsoever of the existing
hierarchy of ministers in the distribution of territorial control. Thus,
it has come about that a given minister has to pass through numer-
ous villages which are under the authority of another minister in
order to reach his own administrative area. In addition, if one
examines the situation closely, it seems that the sole aim of the
administration ["administration" always refers to French adminis-
tration] at that time was to reward certain young and capable
ministers at the expense of those who were too old.

In point of fact, however, one must go back to 1908 to find
the causes of such a state of disorganization. At that time the late
Larrhallé Naba, Pawitraogo, a province chief, was sent off on a
mission to Koudougou, and his vacated office had to be filled.
Later on the emperor dismissed the Kamsogho Naba [51] and re-
placed him with an "incompetent," so the local administration
decided to entrust the province to a more qualified minister.

It would be highly desirable if a new reorganization were put
into effect which would 1) progressively eliminate certain insig-
nificant cantons by combining them into larger units; 2) gather the
so-called independent villages into cantons; and 3) grant to province
chiefs identical material rewards. This last can only be achieved
by an equitable allotment of the cantons. The French administra-
tion has granted equal salaries to all province chiefs and, as a con-
sequence, has established an equality which did not formerly exist.
Three of these officials are now educated men; they enjoy equal
consideration, have the same needs, and alike perform valuable
services. They should all be accorded equal advantages if jealousy
and discontent are to be avoided.

631 Finally, to return to the kombenaba, it should be stated that
the vassals of the Mogho Naba at Koudougou and Kaya enjoy a

643 These dima maintain courts which with some exceptions, are like
631 that of the emperor of the Mossi.

They were appointed directly by their own ministers; the emperor took no effective role in the proceedings.

Today. The local administration has made these petty kings into simple province chiefs and sometimes -- as happened to the Konquizitenga Naba -- into mere canton chiefs.

Respect due the Mogho Naba. Each year the petty dima sent numerous gifts to the Mogho Naba (horses, cattle, and cowries).

643 An error. The Tenkodogo Naba (1), contrary [54] to what

643
634 1. It should not be assumed that the Tenkodogo Naba controls all the cantons in the administrative district of Tenkodogo.

Several Boussancé [Busansi] cantons were ruled by the Mogho Naba before the French occupation. Out of the 14 cantons which now make up the province called Boussanga, 11 were under the emperor's jurisdiction and their chiefs were appointed by him. Like all vassal chiefs, they were required to visit the emperor once a year and to bring him annual tribute.

Since Tenkodogo has been changed first to a subdivision and then to an autonomous circle, the Boussancé chiefs involved have been appointed directly by the local administration with the consent of the population; the Mogho Naba was no longer consulted. After trouble arose over the appointment of a canton chief, the Mogho Naba had to intervene, and from this affair arose the necessity of putting a relative of the emperor at the head of those cantons organized

643
634 as provinces. The choice fell upon a uterine brother of Naba Kom, Moustapha Kongo.

He was recalled in 1930 after ruling for only three years. His dismissal was certainly due to errors committed in the performance of his duties, but it was also caused by the fact that the Boussancé had been independent too long to take kindly to a master.

Thus, as was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the local administration has interfered too much with the organization of the Mossi empire. The position of the Mogho Naba has been completely distorted, and his prestige diminished. This is why the ill-informed official to whom we have already alluded could state that the authority of the Mogho Naba over his vassal chiefs was merely nominal.

A list of Boussancé cantons under the authority of the Mogho Naba follows: (1) Niaogo, (2) Niarba, (3) Lenga, (4) Gon Boussougou, (5) Komtoéga, (6) Beguedo, (7) Ouanragou, (8) Sanogo, (9) Toalla, (10) Zourga, (11) Yakala.

643 has been accepted up to now, is a true king in his territory and as such is absolutely independent of the Mogho Naba at Ouagadougou, to the same degree as the head of the state of Yatenga (Ouahigouya) and the head of Fada N'Gourma.

As was pointed out in an earlier chapter [not translated], the Tenkodogo Naba is the descendant of Naba Zoungrana, the son of Ouedraogo, and is consequently the "elder" of the Mogho Naba, who is a descendant of Naba Oubri, the founder of the Mossi dynasty of Ouagadougou.

631 The Boulsa Naba, a direct descendant of the kourita [representative after death] of [55] Naba Oubri, is not a dima but merely
635 a kombéré. He has a vassal, to be sure, the chief of Koupéla in the circle of Tenkodogo who is now considered a province chief, but the Boulsa Naba himself is a vassal of the Mogho Naba.

643
65/ Mossi circle into several administrative districts, still continue to
178 make substantial annual gifts to the Mogho Naba (cowries, cattle, and a considerable amount of grain, millet and rice).

634 • Payments Due the Kombemba (canton chiefs). Formerly each
65/ canton held one or more ritual feasts each year, and the Mossi subjects, that is, the tengsoba (village elders, notables, and those in comfortable circumstances), regularly made gifts to the canton chief (cowries, goats, sheep, and roosters). The Peulh [Peul] gave cattle.

The canton chiefs also retained a portion of the payment made by the people for the benefit of the Mogho Naba.

[178] At the present time these traditional gifts are still made, but white or light gray roosters are more and more being substituted for livestock. [71]

661 Payments due the Ministers of the Mogho Naba. In order to
431 maintain good relations with the ministers, court officials, and
644 intermediaries between the emperor and his vassals, the canton
634 chiefs in former times used to present unspecified gifts to the high dignitaries at court when they paid their respects to the Mogho Naba. A certain number of cowries was given to the pougriema, first wife of the Mogho Naba (500 cowries equals two and a half francs, formerly 50 centimes).

A canton chief who has been called to Ouagadougou for some reason may choose not to call on the emperor, but he is obligated to bring cowries, a sheep, or a rooster to the minister who is head of the province in which his canton is located.

651 Common laws. (a) Regulation of market fees. Before the ar-
443 rival of the French, market fees at Ouagadougou were collected for the benefit of the Mogho Naba by a collector in his employ.

In important villages, fees were collected by Gourounsi [Grunshi] captives on behalf of the canton chiefs (kombemba).

651 (b) Hunting. In former times, before the fields were cleared
224 for seeding, the Mossi used to go out in groups of several villages
634 on hunting drives. Small game (partridges, guinea fowl, hares, etc.) were left to the hunters. On the other hand, a haunch of any quadruped killed (deer, gazelle, coba [a kind of horse antelope], etc.) was reserved for the canton chief.

651 [72] (c) Fishing. Fishing in the larger water holes could take
 226 place only by authorization of the canton chiefs. The day on
 634 which fishing took place was treated as a holiday. All the young
 men in the village and their neighbors, even if the latter did not
 belong to the canton, came out on the day set by the canton chief
 and fished for the benefit of the naba. All large fish were reserved
 for him, and only the small ones were left to the fishermen.

This practice still prevails.

776 Other common laws. Many deities are worshipped by the
 782 Mossi. Groves, fields, mountains, etc., all have their "god."
 661 It often happens that the naba (canton chief), at the behest of the
 soothsayers, offers an animal. This may be a sheep, a goat, or
 even a cow, and it is offered to one or another of the deities,
 either for his personal interests or for those of his people, or per-
 haps to ask for rain. The naba dispatches some sogoné [servitor]
 or samand'kamba [people of the outer courtyard] to one of the
 villages in his canton to find a victim. The animal is taken with-
 out its owner having any right to complain or to ask for compensa-
 tion. Is there not a Mossi saying to the effect, Talagh-gounda
 [538] Naba'gninga the serf raises livestock for the benefit of his naba?"

For sacrifices prescribed for the Mogho Naba, the animals are
 provided either by the inhabitants of the [73] town of Ouagadougou
 and its environs or by the canton chiefs.

Labor Service Customarily Required of the Mossi on Behalf of their Chiefs

651 Forced labor was used to cultivate the fields of the naba and
 to repair or construct their houses.

644 The Mogho Naba. (a) Cultivation of fields. The duty of
 651 cultivating the fields of the Mogho Naba fell entirely on the Bilbalsé,
 241 the residents of Bilbalogo (section of the Baloum Naba) and on all
 former servitors and descendants of former servitors. The Kam
 Naba (chief of the young men), charged with assembling the
 workers, had a crier announce in all the important markets that on
 such-and-such a day the Bilbalsé were to assemble in the emperor's

651 For the Baloum Naba, the work was done by all the bilbalse.
645 The Kam Naba set the day for the sekka (gathering), and all the
241 young and able-bodied men were required to report. They re-
ceived the food they required from the Baloum Naba. The num-
ber of work days was not fixed. The sekka might be held once or
several times, depending on the acreage.

For the other ministers, the Ouidi Naba, Gounga Naba, and
Larrhallé Naba, the field work was done by the people in their
entourage (that is, the inhabitants of their respective sections)
and in the neighboring villages which were formerly under their
jurisdiction. Since the formation of the canton of Ouagadougou
and its outskirts, the area has been under the exclusive authority
of the Baloum Naba (fourth minister of the emperor).

645 If, however, the fields were so extensive that their cultiva-
476 tion could not be taken care of solely by the above system -- the
241 laborers also had to care for their own fields -- the ministers [76]
called for volunteers from among the young men in the neighboring
villages and paid them with food and drink. This is the sissoaga,
a system commonly in use among the Mossi.

645 (b) Construction and repair of houses. As a general rule, re-
651 pair of the roofs of huts in the establishments of the province chiefs
356 was the duty of the inhabitants of their respective sections and of
the neighboring villages under their jurisdiction.

651 The canton chiefs. The cultivation of the fields of the naba
634 and the repair of the huts in their establishments were wholly in-
241 cumbrant on their subjects. Each village had a fixed number of
356 huts to be repaired or roofed; this is known as sough'pilli, and it
is still in effect annually.

651 Today, perhaps in the interests of tranquillity, canton chiefs
require labor service in their fields only from their sogoné and
samand'kamba and sometimes even resort to the sissoaga.

The local administration, with respect for local customs, has
the policy of organizing the system in a way that, in our opinion,
will safeguard the interests of the natives, overburdened due to
the negligence of the province chiefs, and at the same time will
enhance the prestige of the Mossi chiefs.

653 The naba is not entitled to any other labor services. The
building of dams to provide water for the villages cannot be

Economic Change and Mossi Acculturation

composed of two major groups of communities," Fortes goes on to describe this pattern succinctly: 171

On the one side are those that claim to be descendants of immigrants from parts of the country other than their present habitats. On the other side are communities that claim to be the autochthonous inhabitants. . . . Many of the immigrant communities claim descent from forbears of the Mampuru ruling stock. Though now wholly amalgamated with the alleged aboriginal inhabitants, they have certain ritual observances and a system of chieftainship similar to those of the Mamprusi. . . . The institution distinctive of the autochthonous communities is the office of "Custodian of the Earth." This ritual office, involving priestly functions in connection with the cult of the Earth, is found among many West African peoples from the Senegal to the mouth of the Niger. In the Voltaic region it is the exclusive prerogative of the autochthonous communities.¹ [193]

The inhabitants of the Yatenga at the time of the arrival of the Mossi were the Kurumankobe, or Fulse, as they are called by the Mossi. Their descendants recognize their indigenous origin but have become almost wholly acculturated to the Mossi. While most Mossi bear the sib name Wedraogo and maintain political control in the Yatenga, the descendants of the Kurumankobe usually have the sib name Savadogo and are excluded from the exercise of political authority. They have retained the custodianship of the earth, and the elders of their lineages and sibs are the Mossi's *Tenga Soba namba*, their "earth custodians," charged with propitiating the supernatural forces of nature. [193]

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The present king of the Yatenga, the *Yatenga Naba*, is a lineal descendant of the first ruler, Naba Yadiga. The members of the lineage of the king are called "those who maintain themselves upon us" (*riim namba*). Directly subordinate to the authority of the *Yatenga Naba* are his four grand ministers, each of whom has authority over a particular province (*solum*) of the Yatenga.² [631] [644] [635]

The province over which each of the grand ministers presides as lord is divided up into a number of cantons (*lense*), each of which is ruled by a chief who is the central political authority both of the village in which he resides and of the villages within the canton. Like the province, the concept of the canton is not precisely territorial. Some villages may owe

¹ Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 6.

² These provinces refer not only to geographical areas of the kingdom but to particular categories of the population. For example, the *Bahum Naba* has direct authority over the southern regions of the Yatenga and indirect authority over the cantons of Rizin and Zittenga, political entities which have never fully recognised the central authority of the *Yatenga Naba*. This same minister is also especially charged with maintaining liaison with certain of the more important earth custodians throughout the Yatenga.

Continuity and Change in African Cultures

631 their allegiance directly to the *Yatenga Naba* for historical reasons or
 because their chiefs are related to the royal lineage and superior within
 ● 634 the social hierarchy to the local nobility (*nakomse*) to which the canton
 chiefs belong.

631 Subordinate, in turn, to the canton chief, is the village chief (*Tenga*
Naba), who is the central authority in the aggregation of "quarters"
 622 (*sakse*) of which a Mossi village is composed. These quarters are the
 dwellings of patrilineal extended families and lineages (*boodoose*). Such
 592 a residence is called a *saka* if it contains the house of the lineage elder
 (*sak kasama*) or a *yiri* if it represents only a junior segment. In either
 case the dwelling of the oldest male in the group is surrounded by the
 separate houses of his wives, his younger brothers and their wives, and
 his sons, nephews, cousins, and their wives and children. Each adult
 individual has a separate house within the *saka*.

The smallest unit within the residence of the lineage is the nuclear
 515 family (*zaka*) composed of a man, his wife, and their children. If a man
 has more than one wife, the term *zaka pedere* (*zaka* half) may be used
 when the man's relationship with one of his several wives is being con-
 sidered. He himself is called *zaka soba*. As a young man's family grows,
 each of his new wives is provided with a house adjoining his. In addition
 to his house and the houses of his wives, each man's household contains
 several granaries used to store the produce from the millet fields he has
 been assigned by his lineage. It is with the members of his own household
 that a man is in most frequent social and economic interaction. The
 fields he works with their assistance are the principal source of the food
 supply for the nuclear family unit.

The *yiri* is the next largest social unit within the *saka*. The term
 596 refers to the extended family dwelling inhabited by a man, his wives,
 his male children, and their wives and children. It may be composed of
 as many as fifteen separate nuclear families. While its inhabitants usually
 consist of the married sons of an older man and their nuclear families,
 it may also be composed of a man, his wife and children, and his younger
 brothers and their wives and children. Since its members are closely
 related within the lineage, there is greater social and economic inter-
 action among them than there is with the other lineage members. As
 the *saka soba* is the principal and final authority within the *zaka*, the
yiri soba is most important within the *yiri*.

[592] Composed of the nuclear and extended family dwellings of its mem-
 bers, the Mossi residential unit is typically inhabited by all of the local
 representatives of the sib. In addition to the dwelling of the lineage elder,
 it contains the altar (*kiemserogo*) where the ancestral spirits of the lineage
 are worshipped. The lineage elder has authority over everyone living
 within his *saka*. As counselor to the village chief and intermediary with

645 of the electoral college was not accepted by the populace and dis-
 669 turbances occurred in spite of the proclamation of the king-elect.
 This was when Naba Sagha, the son of Naba Kom, was chosen.
 The people would have liked to see Kaoko, son of Naba Zombéré,
 nominated. Dissatisfied because the sovereign of their choice had
 not reached the throne, they would not acknowledge the man chosen
 by the college. The new monarch managed to take over the throne
 only after waging a bloody battle at the head of his followers against
 his unlucky rival.

645 The province chiefs who are ministers are nominated by the
 635 Moro Naba, who selects the man most deserving of the succession
 among the closest relatives of the chief to be replaced. Province
 chiefs enjoy considerable power in the administration of their
 provinces, they are surrounded with a large court, but they stand
 under the direct control of the Moro Naba.

635 It must be added that aside from the five provinces lying under
 the direct rule of the Moro Naba of Ouagadougou, there were four
 others (Boussouma and Béloussa to the northeast, Yako to the north-
 west, Tenkodogo to the southeast) that were mere vassal provinces
 and that actually enjoyed nearly complete autonomy prior to our
 occupation. Tenkodogo province was especially important.

The chiefs of these /latter/ provinces were true monarchs
 selected in the same fashion as the Moro Naba by the electoral col-
 lege of their province. Once elected, they enjoyed all the prero-
 gatives of sovereignty, nominating the canton chiefs and adminis-
 tering their provinces as they saw fit.

[631] Their power was as absolute in their own sphere as that of the
 Moro Naba over the whole of his subject provinces, but they ac-
 knowledged his sovereignty and offered him a gift as a token of
 their vassalage at the time when their powers were handed over to
 them.

634 /576/ Within the subject provinces, the canton chiefs were
 621 nominated by the Moro Naba on the basis of an introduction by the
 province chief. They were always selected among the closest rela-
 tives of the chief they were to replace, always descendants of
 Oubry, the first Moro Naba. They stood under the direct orders of
 the province chief, whom they had to use as an intermediary to
 communicate with the Moro Naba. It was their task to proceed with

634 the nomination of the village chiefs, who were always selected
621 from the family of the preceding chief.

428 Let us add that in principle, and all other things being equal,
631 it was the eldest son of the deceased chief who was supposed to succeed his father, and this applied to village chiefs as well as to canton chiefs, province chiefs, and the Moro Naba. This principle ran counter to the true patriarchal principle where the younger brother is always the natural and legitimate heir of the deceased brother. The requirements of a warlike existence had probably forced it upon the Mossi at the time of their conquest of the Dagomba and Mossi territories.

This principle of direct inheritance (rather than collateral inheritance) had been restricted, however, by the powers of higher authorities represented by canton chiefs vis-à-vis village chiefs, province chiefs vis-à-vis canton chiefs, the Moro Naba vis-à-vis the province chiefs, and the electoral college of the high dignitaries vis-à-vis the future Moro Naba. In short, the warriors' principle of inheritance from father to eldest son ruled among the Mossi in the power sphere, but had to give way to the exigencies of government whenever necessary.

631 Let us not believe that the third principle, namely the consent of the people involved, was altogether unknown among the Mossi (the consent of the village inhabitants in the case of a village chief, of the canton notables in the case of a canton chief, of the province notables in the case of a province chief, etc.) This third principle, however, was the least important, the least taken into account, the least actualized from a mere potential. /577/ Whenever it clashed with the others, it had to give way.

635 Let us add that the majority of Mossi chiefs were aided by representatives called baloum.

634 "The province chiefs," says the Monographie, "the majority of
624 canton chiefs, and even the chiefs of a few important villages, are aided by one or several baloum or palace masters, whom they choose freely. These are sometimes former captives, but most frequently they are common natives or former soroné, and they are never nakomsé. Their function is not hereditary. It grants them the right to substitute for the naba, to speak and act in his name."

175 schools and 4,000 Moslems in Ouagadougou (seven percent of whom were non-
Mossi). By 1944 there were about 240 schools and approximately 25,000
197 Moslems. The last census, 1954, did not record the number of Koranic schools
871 but gave the figure of 60,000 Moslems in the Ouagadougou region.³ The 4,000
Moslems of Nobéré comprise 42 percent of that district's population. With the
exception of one Catholic school master and the Catholic catechist who came
to the district during 1956, the population is pagan. It might be relevant to
point out that Nobéré has the highest percentage of Moslems in Kombissiri,
an administrative unit (a subdivision) which has 152,000 pagans, 23,000 Mos-
lems, 3,000 Catholics, and about 100 Protestants.

797 As noted above, Islam first came into the Nobéré district with Ngado, who
replaced a dissident pagan chief, but Ngado's lineal descendants reverted to
634 paganism until a few years ago when the present district chief became a nomi-
nal Moslem. The cadet sons of Ngado did not revert to paganism, and today
all the noble sublineages of the district are Moslem. We may note here that one
of the main aspects of Islamic proselytization in this district, as elsewhere
among the Mossi, has been the conversion of persons who do not hold strategic
positions vis-à-vis the ancestors. The present chief is no exception to this rule,
because he is only a nominal Moslem. His eldest son is the only one in the fam-
ily who is not a Moslem—a status which is becoming increasingly difficult to
maintain in a growing Moslem population. The chief himself became partially
converted to Islam in gratitude to a Moslem Hausa trader who cured his ill-
ness. He recites the five daily prayers and observes most of the prescriptions of
[769] Islam, but he still drinks European beer, subscribes to many pagan rites and
beliefs, and supervises the annual Péléga or sacrifice to the ancestors. This dual
allegiance is politically expedient because the chief can function as the head of
the Moslem community as well as the traditional head of all the people. He
does have occasional difficulty with intolerant Moslems who wish him to be-
come a devout Moslem, and with the traditionalists who claim that today the
crops are smaller, the people sicker, and the women barren because of the
neglect of the ancestors. However, with the approach of holy days, these dif-
ferences are resolved in the interest of community harmony.

622 The chiefs of the villages under the overall command of the district chief
are mainly pagan, since they are descended from the district chief replaced by
797 Ngado. Yet they command villages inhabited by the noble Moslem sublineages
769 of the ruling house as well as by commoner lineages. The village chief cannot
become a Moslem because he too is responsible for sacrifices to the ancestors,
without whose help his people would suffer. He does not take an active part in
Moslem festivities, but receives the homage due a chief from the Moslems on
these and other occasions. However, most village chiefs show an interest in
Moslem affairs, and one of them, the chief of Vooko, built a prayer-circle
(*misseri*) for Moslems who came to pay homage.

622 The pivotal role which the village chief plays in the exchange of wives be-
797 tween Moslems and pagans has led indirectly to the increase of the Moslem
582 population. Before the French conquest he gave the Moslems more wives than

797 administration to have one of their converts, a younger son of the late chief,
555 elected to the district chieftainship over his elder brother. This belief is probably unfounded, since the Moro Naba seems to be electing the literate sons of chiefs to their fathers' positions so that educated chiefs, and not educated commoners, can serve as members of French parliamentary bodies. Unfortunately, the people of Manga do not understand modern political problems, and have accepted the new chief only because of their traditional respect for the chieftainship.

634 The conversion of the Manga chief to Catholicism has not engendered
797 many problems for his pagan subjects. The chief's primary duty—to begin
769 the yearly ceremonial cycle of sacrifices to the ancestors—has been taken over
[602] by his father's brother, who is now considered the ritual head of the chiefly lineage. Nevertheless, to the chief still accrue the gains of this ceremony because his followers pay him homage and bring him gifts on his birthday, which comes at this period. Moslems in the community also pay their respects at this time, and they prefer his Catholic birthday celebration to the bloody sacrifices of chickens to the ancestors. On the other hand, the chief shows little of the common Catholic disapproval of Moslems and sends gifts to their leaders on the Moslem feast days. He also entertains the district Moslems when they come to pay him homage.

797 The Catholic chief does not act as a pivot in the exchange of wives between
634 pagans of his lineage and the other lineages. This task now falls to his
582 father's brothers. Nevertheless, as district chief he is constantly involved with the marital problems involving pagan parents and their Catholic children. The main source of the difficulty is that Catholic girls are encouraged to refuse to join their pagan husbands when so ordered by their parents. The mission not only insists that the girl freely choose her own husband, but encourages her to reject a polygynous union. Catholicism thereby interposes itself
[562] between the girls and their society, not only impairing the prestige of their fathers and lineages but also giving the girls more freedom than they would ordinarily possess.

The pagans claim that by encouraging girls to choose mates without parental consent, the Catholics are really taking the opportunity to obtain wives for young Catholic men. Paradoxically, there seems to be some truth in this, since Bouniol, a White Father, states:

A Mossi who is unable to acquire a wife by [traditional] means must either remain unmarried or seduce another man's wife . . . they must choose between celibacy and immorality.

Such a state of affairs creates many problems for the missions, especially as the system is recognized and sanctioned by the colonial authorities. . . . Young native Christians are obviously placed in a very awkward position. Their conversion angers their parents, who refuse to give them a wife; neither will their friends bestow a daughter upon them, because they know that they will not receive one in return, since a Christian may not give a daughter in marriage to a pagan. . . . Consequently, unless the missionaries help them to find a wife, they must remain unmarried—a very discouraging prospect! (1920:160 italics mine)

SKINNER]

Christianity and Islam

1113

When a young Catholic receives a wife through the mission, he may visit her father and pay the customary respect by giving him kola nuts and brass coins. The father of a mission girl may accept or reject his son-in-law as he sees fit, but formerly he could not defy the power of the missions.

A pagan youth who wishes to marry one of the mission girls has to discuss the matter with the priests and swear publicly that he will become a Christian. Before 1946 the young man had to fulfill his promise or be intimidated by the chief and the missionaries until he relented or fled the district. Today, however, the priests usually abandon their efforts to obtain the conversion of the young men after three months have passed. In some cases the young men take their wives and move to other districts, and return only after the girls have given up Catholicism. Despite the lure of wives from the mission, not many young men become Christians on this account because the Mossi are still concerned primarily with family relationships and the effect that conversion would have on these relationships.

The church's prohibition of polygyny is by far the most serious bar to the spread of Catholicism. Many men do not adopt Catholicism simply because they fear that monogamous marriages would not produce children. Father Paternot (Considine 1954:103) has cited a study purporting to show that Christian Mossi have more children than the pagans, but the ordinary people of the district would not accept the facts he presented. They cite their personal experience to the contrary. Dim Delobson (1934:136), a Mossi converted to Catholicism, states:

A certain number of Christians of my acquaintance whose wives did not have children during the first years of marriage had recourse to magical practices in order to get children. These simple people thought that although they had an omnipotent God beside them, they could impudently—after all the good priests will not know about it—ask the little, but also powerful gods to grant them some material favors here on earth. When the gods given children were taken for Holy Baptism, they were given Christian names instead of the names of the earth shrines, and they did not wear magical charms which would have indicated to the priest the real state of affairs. Nevertheless, the children were bathed in water to which magical potions were added, and when the mothers went to visit their parents, sacrifices of chickens were given to the benevolent Tengkougas.

The Mossi's strong desire for children is admittedly one of the main reasons for leaving the Catholic Church so that they can take other spouses in addition to barren ones. The church has now belatedly recognized this problem and, knowing that it cannot prevent men from taking plural wives, allows them to come to church but prohibits them from taking the Mass.

Many cultural factors besides the desire for children make polygyny important for the Mossi, and make conversion detrimental to the functioning of their family system. Because of lineage opposition to their conversions, some converts are forced to establish nuclear households—a practice out of harmony with the normal rhythm of Mossi life. The reason for this disharmony is that Mossi women married to Catholics must work alone instead of with

PATTERNS OF SUCCESSION TO POLITICAL OFFICE

during a period of transition to effective independence.

The Mossi have the unique distinction of having preserved their ethnic identity and political autonomy throughout all the vicissitudes of Sudanese history until conquered by the French on September 1, 1896. The origin of Mossi society is couched in mythological terms. According to their tradition they came from Dagomba in the Gold Coast (present day Ghana) sometime during the 11th or 12th century and moved northward towards the Niger River. During this migration they carved out three large kingdoms and many small principalities by conquering and absorbing some of the indigenous Ninisi and Foulse and Dogon populations, and by chasing the others into the cliffs of Bandiagara. In 1328, according to Es Sadi in the *Tarikh es Soudan*, the Mossi attacked, burned, and sacked Timbuktu, then held by Mali, and during the following century attacked Walata and Banku. They received their first setback by the Ali, and were severely beaten by Askia the Great, the usurper of the Songhai throne, who led a *jihad* against them in 1499. But their attacks into the Niger bend did not cease until the Moroccans became masters of Timbuktu sometime in the early 1590's. From that period until the French conquest, the Mossi remained relatively quiescent. They developed and maintained an economy based on grain cultivation, livestock rearing, cotton production, and trade between the forest zones and the desert. Their political system crystallized into a loose confederacy of fairly autonomous kingdoms and principalities, sometimes tribute to the Moro Naba, the ruler of Wagadougou.

Wagadougou, the most important Mossi political entity, was like the lesser kingdoms, pyramidal in political structure. At the top was and still is the Moro Naba, a lineal descendant of Wedraogo, the Dagomba conquerer who founded the Mossi group and Moro Naba Wubri, the first ruler of the Wagadougou dynasty. Paying allegiance to him, were the princes who ruled such autonomous provinces as Yako, Boulsa, Mane, Riziam, and Boussouma. These princes were all sons or near relatives of the early Moro Nabas. Directly under the Moro Naba were district chiefs who were descended from the cadet branches of the ruling family. The villages within the district were in turn ruled by the chiefs of the indigenous populations. In many of the villages,

SOVEREIGNTY, KINSHIP, COMMUNITY

642¹⁴
 613
 173 had done so with full permission of his father and in place of an unadven-
 778 turous elder brother.

635 For example, the ruling family of the Boulsa province claimed that its
 642 ancestor, Naba Name~~de~~, was the eldest son of Mogho Naba Oubri and
 613 chose to become his father's *Kourita* (a young son of a deceased Mogho
 173 Naba chosen as his father's personal representative on earth) and go into
 778 exile rather than subject his younger brother to the ordeal. At the same
 time, Namende sought to retain royal power equal to that of his brother,
 the new Mogho Naba, by taking Oubri's royal amulets with him.⁸

635 Mane province, too, was founded by one Nyaseme, a son of Koudoumie,
 642 who felt that he should have been given the nam. When routed in battle
 613 by his elder brother Kouda, he moved into the region of Mane, where he
 631 defeated the indigenous Ninisi and ruled over them. The princes who
 broke away from Ouagadougou during Koudoumie's reign considered
 themselves theoretically equal to the supreme ruler. Thus, they took the
 title of Dim. By so doing, they dramatized their claim to equality of status,
 if not of power, with the Mogho Naba, and their determination to "sub-
 mit only to God."⁹

642 The Mossi insist that the relationship between the Mogho Naba and
 643 the Dimdamba was similar to that between father and sons, since the
 613 Dimdamba were "really the sons of the Mogho Naba" and are said to have
 631 acted as such. This analogy is interesting in view of the Mossi traditional
 (593) pattern of avoidance—combined with love and tolerance—between fathers
 and elder sons.⁹ The Dimdamba were often allowed to act at variance with
 the Mogho Naba. Some of them shifted allegiance from kingdom to king-
 dom; others usurped the power of the Mogho Naba over smaller districts,
 or claimed that they had been given this power; and most of them reg-
 ulated their own affairs with little interference from their sovereign. He,
 as "father," interfered on occasion in their internal affairs, demanding
 help from them and often chastising them if they failed to comply.

634 The Mogho Naba and the Dimdamba often appointed their younger
 631 sons or brothers as rulers (*Kombemba*) of the districts that made up their
 613 kingdoms and principalities. In this way, power and authority were kept
 642 within the royal clan and its lineages. Nevertheless, in keeping with the
 concept of corporate access to the nam, the rulers of these dependencies
 had traditions that served to reconcile their claims to kingly or princely
 status with their actual subordinate position. District founders, too, were
 often portrayed as eldest sons who had been cheated out of their patrimony
 or had voluntarily left it to establish new districts. In some cases, the legen-
 dary heroes were granted miraculous births as well.

SOVEREIGNTY, KINSHIP, COMMUNITY

15

The people of Nobere district have a legend that its founder, Naba Biligo, was sired by a spirit who impregnated the wife of Mogho Naba Oubri. She carried him in her womb for more than a year, and noticed that although her belly was extended during the daytime, it was always flat at night. She became concerned and confided her worries to the ruler's first wife, who asked the other co-wives to keep vigil for the child. When they arrived in the evening, they noticed that the woman's belly was flat. They awakened her and kept watch until dawn. At cock's crow, the child Biligo returned from his nocturnal wanderings. Seeing the women, he fell from the top of the hut into his mother's lap and began to cry as though he had just been born. When Biligo grew to manhood, he went hunting in the Nobere area. He found the region so fertile that when he returned to Ouagadougou, he told his father, Mogho Naba Oubri, that he did not want the nam but preferred to conquer the Ninisi of Nobere and become their chief.

The people of Doulougou give a slightly different account of the founding of their district. Their founder, a man called Moumde, was also said to be a son of Mogho Naba Oubri. He did not like the capital, and rode all over the kingdom until he came to Doulougou. He liked this region so much that he asked his father to name him chief over its indigenous population. Oubri then sent down an army, defeated the Ninisi, and appointed Moumde as Doulougou Naba.

According to some traditions, Mogho Nanamse appointed their sons as chiefs of conquered districts. A more common tradition, represented by the Biligo legend, is that the founders of local districts conquered their territories with or without the permission of the Mogho Naba. Biligo, the founder of Nobere district, is said to have found the area sparsely inhabited by Ninisi, most of whom fled before him. A person of gigantic proportions, he easily defeated those Ninisi who elected to give him battle. He then went into the woods, where he invited the Ninisi leader, an earth-priest (*Tengoba*) called Tedego, to return to the district. Biligo promised him and the other refugees safe conduct and good treatment if they agreed to return. Tedego refused, whereupon Biligo captured him and installed him in a special quarter, with the injunction that he and his family should make sacrifices to the local earth shrines (*Tengkouga*) in the name of the new ruling lineage. Naba Biligo went back into the woods, captured the other refugees, and resettled them in their villages. He allowed the local *Tengobadamba* to retain their religious duties, but sent his sons to take political control of the villages. Not satisfied with the number of people under his command, Naba Biligo then raided Gurunsi country and cap-

SOVEREIGNTY, KINSHIP, COMMUNITY

634
173 tured slaves, whom he settled behind his compound and in separate villages under their own chiefs. He also welcomed refugees from wars in other territories and established them in special villages under their own chiefs.

631
173 The Dimdamba followed a similar practice in establishing power and control. According to Cheron, when Mogho Naba Koudoumie sent his son Tiraongo to conquer the Ninisi of Boussouma, the Ninisi defended themselves fiercely. Tiraongo's advance was thus very slow until he found a Ninisi named Wine, dressed in a panther's skin and hiding in a hole, "who on the promise that his life would be saved, consented to serve as guide to Tiraongo and to make propitiatory sacrifices to the divinities of the country. Thanks to him, the Mossi were able to progress to Somtongande." Boulssa tradition recounts that when Naba Namende left Ouagadougou as the Kourita of Mogho Naba Oubri and took possession of their province, he placed his sons at the head of the principal villages "in order to control it [Boulssa] better." One son was even sent to rule over a village at the request of the local Tengsoba.

634
613 The villages that made up a Mossi district were usually ruled by chiefs who belonged to sub-lineages of the local ruling lineage. These village
778 chiefs and the members of their lineage formed a noble class, the *nakomce*
[565] ("children of the Naba"). As long as a lineage held the nam of a district, all of its sub-lineages had all the privileges of the noble class, regardless of whether they had charge of villages. But if the Mogho Naba deprived
[558] a ruling lineage of the nam by deposing the district chief, all its members were reduced to commoner status. Such people still traced their descent from the Mogho Naba who was the ancestor of their lineage founder, but this relationship ceased to be important unless the lineage recovered the nam of the district. If it did not, the former ruling lineage officially lost its ancient link with the royal clan within a few generations and became a nondescript local group.

634
613 The place of a deposed royal lineage was usually taken by the relatives of the nobles who subsequently acquired the nam of the district. These
778 newcomers were genealogically closer to the ruling Mogho Naba, and
557 formed the new *nakomce* of the district. The new district chief sometimes sent his sons to rule over the villages under his command. But if the village
558 chiefs did not suffer the same fate as their lineage head at the hands of the Mogho Naba, the new district chief often permitted them to retain their posts. Thus they retained possession of the nam but lost their noble status. They served the new district chief in a political sense much as the Tengsoba served him in a ritual sense.

554
602
778 The plight of deposed district *nakomce* shows quite clearly the distinc-

SOVEREIGNTY, KINSHIP, COMMUNITY

tion made by the Mossi between kinship and sovereignty within their governmental system. Kinship was the basis on which the ruling class was formed. However, sovereignty itself, although associated with kinship, was not unalterably linked with it. When a ruling Mossi kin group held the nam, its subgroups were linked by bonds of prestige. But once this group lost the nam or access to the nam, its component subgroups began to drift away. That this situation could exist shows the true nature of the relationship between sovereignty and kinship within the Mossi political system.

There were other chiefs in Mossi districts who had never had either a lineal or a collateral relationship with any lineage of the ancient royal clan. These men were the descendants of provincial ministers. They became chiefs for the same reasons that the sons of ruling sovereigns became chiefs. When a Mogho Naba sent his sons to replace deposed district chiefs, the young men were usually accompanied by a full complement of administrators. These administrators, mostly younger sons of administrators at Ouagadougou who would not normally succeed their fathers, often automatically replaced the administrators of the former chiefs. But if, for reasons of administrative efficiency, the new chiefs elected to retain the administrators of their predecessors, they assigned village chieftainships to the newcomers. They might also settle them in independent hamlets and furnish them with wives and slaves. For chiefs in this category, kinship did play an initial role in the accession to power; but since they were not related to the district chief, they never gained noble status. Socially, they were comparable to chiefs who were former nobles; as in the latter's case, their kinship ties with the administrators at Ouagadougou gradually lost their significance.

There were yet other kinds of chiefs or men who rated the title Naba in Mossi districts. They included: the descendants of aboriginal chiefs, the chiefs of alien groups, and the chiefs of the Mossi refugee groups that had left other districts because of disputes over the nam. In districts where there were large groups of the autochthonous Ninisi, there were Ninisi "chiefs"; in most cases, however, these "chiefs" were really the senior Tengsobadamba of the villages. In most other districts, the sole Ninisi "chief" was the official Tengsoba of the district chief. This man had ritual power but no political power. Yet he was called Naba, because the Mossi thought that all persons in positions of command or prominence must be named chiefs. Villages made up of aliens (Busansi, Gurunsi, Yarse, and occasionally Fulani) had chiefs in the true sense of the word. These men were granted access to the nam by the district chiefs, and their

17 554
602
778602
554
634
557

634

[778]
[428]

SOVEREIGNTY, KINSHIP, COMMUNITY

634
[778]⁸
[428] power and authority were inherited by their families in the same manner as among Mossi lineages.

634 The last important category of Mossi chiefs included men who ruled over slave and serf villages. These men were themselves the descendants of slaves and serfs, for no free-born Mossi were placed in such posts. Needless to say, these chiefs were never lineally or collaterally related to the district chiefs, and therefore were never nobles. However, they might be [602] affinally related to district chiefs, and in such cases the relationship was often of some political value.

It must be emphasized that once a man was made chief, he was respected, if not honored, by all the people of the district. In some districts, the Dapore Naba and the Baglere Naba, chiefs of two categories of serfs, were among the most valued assistants of the Kombere Naba. The only [565] people who sometimes refused to honor the village chiefs were the nakomce, [778] who were the holders of the district nam. Nevertheless, they were censured by the Kombere if they were disrespectful to his subordinates. No district chief could allow his government to be jeopardized by the maltreatment of persons who served it. In any conflict between the nam and the kin group, the supremacy of the nam was always maintained.

613 Every Mossi ruler, whether he held the nam of a kingdom, principality, 631 district, or village, was *ipso facto* also *Boodkasma* (literally, "family head") 622 of the local segment of his boodoo. The word boodoo refers to patrilineal groups that anthropologists would normally call clans, maximal lineages, major lineages, or minor lineages. The Mossi do not make any terminological distinction between these levels of their segmentary lineage system. Nevertheless, they recognize and use the status differences between these units to limit the access of each unit to the corporate assets of the boodoo. Their major social distinction is drawn between the minor lineage, which is also called boodoo, and its component minimal lineages. Each minimal- [596] lineage unit is called a *babissi* (literally, "father's brother"), and is really a large extended family composed of relatives who had a common ancestor, three, four, or at most five generations ago.

643 The Mogho Naba, for example, was head of his *babissi* as well as ex 613 officio head of the entire royal clan. Those rulers who claimed equality with him claimed that they, not he, were the true heads of the royal clan and the "direct" descendants of Ouedraogo and Oubri. As a function of their political position, the many princes and district chiefs were heads of their own *babissi* and of the maximal lineage to which their *babissi* belonged. Like the Mogho Naba, they were the ex officio heads of all members 631 613 of their boodoo who lived in their territory and who claimed descent from the same royal ancestors.

SOVEREIGNTY, KINSHIP, COMMUNITY

19
622
613

the same royal ancestors. A Mossi village chief was likewise the head of his babissi and ex officio head of all the other babissi in his village that belonged to his boodoo. As the official Boodkasma of his village's ruling lineage, the village chief held junior or senior status in relation to other village chiefs of the same boodoo who were also the Boodkasemdamba of their respective lineage segments.

Possession of the nam influenced the pattern of seniority within lineages and lineage segments. In most cases, seniority was based on age and generation. Thus, the oldest man of the oldest generation was the Boodkasma, and his office devolved upon the next oldest man when he died. But within the ruling lineages and their segments, the man who held the nam, whether young or old, was automatically senior to all others. This does not mean that these ruling lineages did not recognize age and generational seniority. For example, whenever a chief died and sovereignty returned to the lineage as a corporate group, the senior noble of the senior generation became the acting Boodkasma and lineage head. Like all Boodkasemdamba, he managed the affairs of his group, but only until a new chief was elected. The new Boodkasma, however, sometimes delegated some of his social rights and ritual obligations to this elder, who was often regarded as the unofficial or semi-official Boodkasma of his lineage. Similarly, the senior nobles of all segments of the ruling lineage were also regarded as Boodkasemdamba. Because they were so regarded and because of the role they played, these men seldom came into conflict with the district chief. He gave them a certain amount of leeway in dealing with the everyday affairs of their group. It was understood by all, however, that nothing should jeopardize the most important asset of the lineage—the nam. Therefore, the chief was obeyed in all important matters involving the noble lineage of the district. In such matters he listened to no one; for, as one district chief said, "Once I have received the nam from the Mogho Naba, no man in this district stands above me!"

This dominance of political relations over social relations was made clear by the behavior of commoners toward ruling nobles on the one hand, and of nobles among themselves on the other. Commoners showed greater respect and deference toward members of the ruling babissi than toward persons belonging to other noble babissi. Thus, they were more respectful to the district chief's father's brothers, his siblings, and his children than to his more distant relatives. Within the noble lineage itself, everyone had to respect the chief as the holder of the nam, but otherwise the generational principle of respect and deference was maintained. The eldest nobleman of the eldest generation received deference from all others (excluding the

[578]

[634]

554
613
571
778

613 appealed to the district chief, and occasionally the woman was sent back.
 565 A nobleman set on having a certain girl as a wife usually had small brace-
 583 lets like those worn by all noble wives placed on her ankles. Once this
 was done, the chief could not be compelled to send her back to her parents,
 and any man who tried to retrieve her was guilty of interfering with a
 nobleman's wife and could be killed for it. In fact, only the male relatives
 of noblemen's wives could converse with them without running the risk of
 being apprehended and executed.

• 634 The district was the most important unit in the Mossi principalities
 and kingdoms. It was on this level that the Mossi nobility came into direct
 contact with the various social and ethnic groups of the society. Here,
 kinship and affinal ties linked the conquerors and the conquered, the an-
 cient and recent nobility, the refugees from conflicts over the nam and the
 resident aliens, in a network of social, ritual, economic, and political rela-
 tionships. It was also on this level that myths and traditions legitimized
 most effectively the Mossi socio-economic and political system as well as
 the relationships between the various social and ethnic groups.

634 The number and size of the Mossi districts varied greatly from one
 161 principality or kingdom to another. Some districts were large and wealthy,
 with a number of large villages; smaller districts had a larger proportion
 of small villages and hamlets. The average number of these small units
 was probably between fifty and sixty-five per district. The population of
 the districts ranged from 10,000 to 35,000 persons. Some *tense* (villages)
 had as many as 5,000 inhabitants and some as few as 50. The average vil-
 lage had about 500 inhabitants. But regardless of size, all Mossi districts
 and component villages had basically the same structure and fulfilled the
 same functions. The structure of Nobere district is representative. Nobere
 [131] covered approximately 200 square miles. It was bounded on the east by a
 district called Manga, on the north by the districts of Toece and Djiba, and
 on the west and south by the Red Volta River. A census taken in 1905,
 just nine years after the European conquest, showed the Nobere popula-
 tion to be about 13,200.¹⁰ In 1955 approximately 10,000 persons inhabited
 24 villages and hamlets scattered through the more inhabitable part of the
 district.

634 The number of villages and hamlets in Nobere district apparently fluc-
 621 tuated. Villages were occasionally abandoned, while small hamlets grew
 into prominent settlements. The people of Nobere always tried to establish
 [361] their villages as close to the Red Volta as possible in order to utilize the
 more fertile lands. But they were repeatedly driven back by disease and

SOVEREIGNTY, KINSHIP, COMMUNITY

25

marauding animals. Just twenty years ago, the six villages that lay closest to the river were gradually abandoned and their populations absorbed by other villages. As of 1955, three of these populations were still paying allegiance to their former chiefs—a fact that bears out the Mossi axiom that chiefs govern people rather than land. The three other chiefs had lost control over their followers, who had placed themselves under the protection of the chiefs of their host villages. On occasion, Nobere also lost villages to other districts. One such village, Rissoma, was taken away from Nobere and given to Djiba when one of the Nobere district chiefs had a dispute with the Mogho Naba. 634 621

The hub or center of Nobere district, like that of all Mossi districts, was Nab'tenga (also called Nobere Naba Tenga, or Na-tenga), the village of the district chief. This village was rather large and in many respects a replica in miniature of the capital of Ouagadougou. Like most Mossi villages, Nab'tenga was divided into sections, quarters, or neighborhoods called *saghse* (sing. *saka*), which included a number of compounds (*yiya*, sing. *yiri*; or *zughse*, sing. *zuka*). The district chief's compound was called Nab'yiri. He lived there surrounded by his wives, unmarried daughters, younger children, and pages. His older male children lived in separate compounds within the same *saka*. The *saghse* of Nab'tenga included Ouidi, the *saka* of the Ouidi Naba; Balbalse, the *saka* of the Baloum Naba; Tansoba, the *saka* of the local war minister (Tansoba or Tampsobo); Baglere, the *saka* of the chief's serfs; Bendere, the *saka* of the chief's musicians; Ouedrange, the *saka* of the chief's grooms; and Pwese, the *saka* of the guardians of the chief's wives. Scattered among them were the *saghse* of noble families, smiths, the Moslem Imam, and other persons. The most important market place in the district was located about four hundred yards from the chief's compound. 592 591 443

The number and types of social and ethnic groups within the district and its villages reflected Nobere's history. When the French arrived, the district chief was Kaglere, a descendant of Ngado, who was a son of Mogho Naba Sagha I (ca. 1787-1803). Ngado had been sent to Nobere at the end of the eighteenth century to replace Naba Peka (a descendant of Naba Biligo), who had been deposed and killed by Mogho Naba Sagha during a civil war. The other chiefly descendants of Biligo, however, were not deposed by Ngado; they remained in charge of all but five or six of the major villages in the district. The chiefs of such villages as Ronse, Barkago, Tewarka, and Pinse are *yagense* (descendants) of Naba Biligo. The village called Passintenga was ruled by the descendants of a Busanga from Lenga called Passentre, who allegedly had been given a wife by Biligo. It is not 634 622 175

634 known, however, whether this woman was Biligo's daughter or one of his
 622 pughsiudse. The people of Passintenga claimed descent from Biligo's
 175 daughter, but the other groups in the district questioned this ancestry. The
 village called Bourougna had two chiefs. One, the Tang Naba, was de-
 scended from a son of a Ouidi Naba of Ouagadougou who had settled in
 Nobere; the other, the Yang Naba, claimed descent from an aboriginal
 Ninisi man and woman of Biligo's lineage. The Yang Naba was thus an-
 other of Biligo's yagense in the district. The chief of Nimpwe village was
 a descendant of the aboriginal Ninisi people and was the principal Tenga-
 soba in the district. He had more ritual power than political power, however.
 The nam of Basbedo village was held by a man descended from Busansi
 refugees. Living in this village was a man with the honorific title of Sou-
 lougre Naba, who claimed descent from the most important Ninisi family
 who had lived in the district prior to the arrival of Biligo.

634 Most of the nobles of the local ruling lineage lived either in the saghse
 173 of the district villages or in isolated hamlets. Local tradition holds that one
 621 of the conditions set by Naba Ngado for allowing Biligo's descendants to
 [613] remain as village chiefs was the right to settle nineteen of his sons in many
 [565] of the villages. He allegedly sent *mabissi* (sons of the same mother) to the
 same village. By so doing, he took advantage of the normal lines of fission
 that are created after the death of a Mossi father and prevented undue rival-
 ries. Yet there was no driving necessity for him to do so, because there were
 more villages than chief's sons available. In fact, there are still many vil-
 lages without nobles in Nobere district. The people of Passintenga, for in-
 stance, allegedly refused to have nobles live among them, while the people
 of Nimpwe allegedly killed by sorcery all the nobles who ever tried to live
 there. The actual reason for the absence of nobles in these villages may have
 been that the district chief did not wish to send his sons to villages into
 which his daughters had married or where there lived earth priests who
 [565] were thought to be powerful sorcerers. Nobles were often unwelcome,
 feared, and resisted, because they tended to exploit the village people and
 to take advantage of the commoners.

621 The villages of Nobere district, like those of other Mossi districts, were
 167 populated in part by refugees and strangers. Several saghse in Togese vil-
 173 lage were inhabited by Mossi refugees who had fled a district called Guiergo
 after a fight over the nam of that district. Scattered throughout the dis-
 trict's villages were people of unknown origin called Siamse. The Siamse
 found in the villages of Tewaka and Nabadogo claimed that their an-
 cestors had "followed" Naba Biligo when he came down from Ouagadou-
 gou to found the district. Several saghse in Bourougna village were in-

went to Djiba when his grandfather died and his father was installed as Mogho Naba.

- 634 The origin of Djiba's status as the seat of the Crown Prince is rather obscure. The people of the neighboring district of Nobere say that Djiba 644 was founded by a "companion" of their own founder, Naba Biligo, one of 173 the numerous "eldest" sons of Mogho Naba Oubri, the implication being that Djiba was supervised by Nobere. However, no one seems to know when Djiba's status changed or what happened to the ancient family who used to govern it. The consensus is that in earlier times the heir presumptive to Ouagadougou did not necessarily become chief of Djiba, but was given any district whose chieftainship was vacant when he came of age. Dim Delobson reports that Djiba became the district of the Crown Prince sometime during the seventeenth century, when Mogho Naba Zombere, who had reigned for sixty years, found it necessary to establish a permanent seat for his heir.⁵⁵ However, Dim Delobson does not report under what conditions Djiba was chosen, nor does he say what happened to the local ruling lineage when this transfer took place. That the transfer was carried out in the manner reported by Dim Delobson is not doubted, because each new [558] Mogho Naba obtained districts for his relatives in this way. Through this process, the people of the ancient ruling lineages were usually reduced to [613] the level of commoners, and this is apparently what happened to the rulers of Djiba.

634 The first public sign that the young prince was being prepared for the 643 nam came in the form of a summons commanding him to go to Ouagadougou to be installed as Djiba Naba. On his way to the capital, he visited several villages where the local Tengaobadamba made sacrifices to the earth goddess in his name. He took this opportunity to meet with the district chiefs and their assembled village chiefs; he was entertained by them; and in turn he distributed gifts to the old women, whose praises were considered especially effective in bringing health and long life. When the boy finally arrived at the capital, he lodged at the compound of the Kambo Naba, head of the palace guard, until the Mogho Naba and his ministers installed him as chief of Djiba.

The installation rites for the Crown Prince were very similar to those already described for the Mogho Naba, and identical to those for the district chiefs. During the ceremony, no mention was made of the fact that the prince was the son of the Mogho Naba. The only special feature was that when the prince went into the courtyard after the ceremony to render homage to the Mogho Naba, he sat in an area assigned to him by custom. When the ruler appeared, the prince followed the Gounga Naba, who was pro-

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

47

vincial minister for Djiba, and rendered homage to the sovereign. After this reception the prince went to the Gounga Naba's compound, which henceforth was his headquarters whenever he visited Ouagadougou; for, like other district chiefs, he had to consult with this minister before seeing the monarch. Everyone in the kingdom had to follow the political hierarchy, even the ruler's heir.

The young prince remained at his host's house and from there visited the other important officials, in the order of their rank, receiving from each presents of sheep, millet beer, kola nuts, and sometimes wives. He then visited the Imam of the Ouagadougou Moslem community, where he received a blessing in the name of Allah and was given kola nuts and millet water sweetened with honey. On the fourth or fifth day the prince went to a small village called Zoangha, where he made a sacrifice to his ancestors and requested their protection against all enemies.⁷⁹ He returned to Ouagadougou on the same day and was given a palace escort to accompany him to his district.

During his journey, the royal heir had the opportunity to establish or re-establish friendly relations with district chiefs who were now his peers, but who might someday become his subjects. He visited in turn the war leader at Tansobatenga, the Koubri Naba, the Ipelse Naba, and the Kondrin Naba. Each of these chiefs offered him livestock, slaves, and wives. He, in turn, distributed salt (a valuable commodity) to the old women and gave kola nuts and other commodities to the chiefs' head wives. The Bagamini Naba presented the prince with a special quiver of arrows, and the chief of the Fulani at Bedego gave him a pretty maiden and one of his best bulls. The prince spent a few days with each of his hosts, but stayed for seven days in Bere, a district bordering on his own. The Bere Naba gave him a wife, a robe, and a cow, and sent messengers to the village chiefs of Djiba to announce that their chief had arrived in Bere. The chiefs then journeyed to Bere, pledged allegiance to their ruler, and presented gifts to him. On the seventh night there was a ritual (whose main features are unclear), in the course of which the prince entered Djiba secretly on horseback, accompanied only by one servant, one groom, and the nobles and chiefs of Djiba.⁸⁰ Most members of the escort who had accompanied him from the capital were left behind at Bere, and followed only when the prince had established himself in his district. When the prince's band entered Djiba under cover of darkness, it was met by the local Ouidi Naba, who ruled the district in the absence of a Crown Prince. The Ouidi Naba now became the prince's protector if the boy were still young, or his most trusted adviser if he were old enough to rule by himself.

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

634 As soon as the prince arrived, the Ouidi Naba made preparations to
 644 receive the chiefs of such local districts as Manga, Nobere, and Basgana,
 [431] who visited the prince and brought him wives, livestock, and money. Dur-
 [431] ing a seven-day period, other chiefs and well-wishers visited the new chief
 [431] and offered him gifts. When this period was over, the new Djiba Naba
 [431] gave wives to the noble members of his escort and livestock, money, and
 kola nuts to the commoners and serfs, and sent the group back to Ouaga-
 dougou. Then he settled down to the life of a typical district chief, govern-
 ing his villages in the name of the Mogho Naba, paying him tribute, and
 settling disputes among his villagers. Dim Delobson reports that the other
 [431] district chiefs and the heads of such principalities as Boussouma and Con-
 [651] quizitenga formerly sent presents to the Djiba Naba when they sent their
 annual tribute to the Mogho Naba.²¹ But this contradicts all that I heard
 and saw of the relationship between the royal heir and the other district
 chiefs. They treated him as an equal and showed no deference to him either
 in private or on ceremonial occasions. As a matter of fact, in the presence
 of the Mogho Naba, the royal heir actually effaced himself before the other
 district chiefs. This behavior served to preserve the concept of equal access
 [643] of all members of the ruling clan to the ancestral nam. The Mogho Naba
 was head of the ruling group as well as political leader of the Mossi. His
 son, on the other hand, was often a junior in terms of age and generation
 within the ruling group, but politically he was on the same level as the other
 district chiefs. The sovereign could not show by his behavior that his son
 was either actually or potentially superior to the other Nanamse; nor could
 the prince presume to be haughty because of his strategic but accidental
 relationship to the actual possessor of the nam. Had he tried to do so, he
 might have ruined his chances of being selected to take over the "house"
 of his father and his father's fathers.

643 The relations between the Mogho Naba and his children, including his
 644 heir, were characterized by formality—at least in public. Nevertheless, the
 593 ruler took a vital interest in the training and welfare of the youthful Djiba
 634 Naba. Mogho Naba Wobogo (1890-96) reportedly had the Ouidi Naba
 and the Baloum Naba of Djiba executed because the Crown Prince died
 under strange circumstances while under their care. Yet the Mogho Naba
 was not expected to enjoy seeing his son and heir, because of the Mossi
 father's traditional anxiety regarding those individuals who would profit
 most from his death. At the assemblies of district chiefs called by the Mogho
 Naba, the royal heir was not even greeted by his father; moreover, the heir
 usually stood at the edge of the assembly and left without attending the
 customary feast. However, there is considerable evidence that the Mogho

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

49 643

Naba regularly saw his son in private, and that the prince often interceded successfully with his father for the lives of rebels or criminals.

644

593

634

The Mogho Naba seldom saw his younger sons, who usually remained with their mothers' patrilineages until they were old enough to be assigned district chieftainships or sent to live in villages controlled by the Baloum Naba. He was rather suspicious of these boys, who, if certain traditions are believed, were not averse to plotting the death of the Djiba Naba in order to succeed to the nam. The district chiefs also feared these younger sons, in whose favor they were often deposed by the Mogho Naba. Almost all of the dynastic changes that occurred in the Mossi districts seem to have stemmed from a ruler's attempt to find districts for his brothers or his younger sons.

The ruler was less concerned with the welfare of his daughters and female relatives. Their marriages seldom benefited the political system. As a matter of fact, the behavior of a royal princess usually strained the relations between her husband and the ruling lineage. The reason for this was a status conflict: as wives, they had low prestige in Mossi society; but as relatives of the Mogho Naba, they enjoyed high status. This contradiction made it difficult for them to accept the low estate of wives. Consequently, they clashed with their husband and often dominated the women and co-wives in his compound. Since few Mossi men tolerate strife within their household, these noble wives often withdrew from their husband's home and established one of their own. The one exception to this pattern was the ruler's eldest daughter, the Napoko, whose ceremonial duties at his death and during the interregnum compelled her to remain loyal to the husband chosen for her by the king. Like her brother, the Crown Prince, if she violated any of the traditions and thus became ineligible to fulfill her duties to her father and to the state, she endangered the country at its weakest moment, when the government was being transferred from the deceased Mogho Naba to his successor.

643

644

593

[562]

The death of a Mogho Naba was usually attributed to foul play or supernatural forces. When Mogho Naba Sagha II died in 1957, a report from Ouagadougou stated that the Governor of the Upper Volta had felt constrained to have an autopsy performed to quell rumors that the monarch had died of poisoning.²² The obvious function of such rumors was to dramatize the gravity of the situation during the interregnum.

643

761

Because the Mogho Naba was usually accompanied by a page, it was often this boy who witnessed his death. It was the page's responsibility to notify the Baloum Naba, who notified, in order, the Ouidi Naba, the Larhalla Naba, the Kamsaogho Naba, the Gounga Naba, the ruler's children,

643

763

[644]

[645]

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

51

mal lineage segment except the pretenders to the throne shaved their heads as a sign of mourning. The royal pretenders donned sheepskin mantles to signify that they were willing to "eat the nam." Once the ruler had been buried, the country settled down to an uneasy peace until the eighth day, when the funeral ceremonies took place. In the meantime, the Napoko symbolically held daily court, and the Tansoba's army acted as a check against the attempts of ambitious princes to seize power by force of arms. [70]

Two days before the funeral, the Kamsaogho Naba selected the Kourita, who was to replace the Napoko as the living symbolic representative of the dead Mogho Naba. The person chosen to be Kourita was usually a young son of the deceased king, but since this person was banished from the capital, most of the royal wives hid their young children or fled the palace with them." Once the Kourita had been chosen, the Kamsaogho Naba performed a ceremony (similar to those connected with the divine kings of the Near East) during which the youth was given one of his father's horses, dressed in his father's clothes, and given his father's youngest widow as a wife. He was then paid the homage due the Mogho Naba, and after receiving many gifts from the dignitaries, he was banished from Ouagadougou forever. As he went through the country, he was treated like the Mogho Naba and given many wives and presents. If he should chance to return to Ouagadougou or see the new Mogho Naba, either or both of them would be killed by the ancestors. Many Mossi districts seem to have been founded by exiled Kouritadamba. These men were undoubtedly among the numerous "elder" sons of past kings who are said to have "refused" the nam and gone to live in the districts now governed by their descendants. [17]

The choice and banishment of the Kourita heralded the funeral rites, which were characterized by numerous animal sacrifices to the ancestors in the name of the deceased ruler. On the afternoon of the first day of the funeral, the Crown Prince mounted a horse and left the palace by the women's door. The Napoko then took the bridle of her brother's horse and led him and an immense crowd of cavalry, armed warriors, and musicians around the palace walls three times. After the third round, the Napoko demanded that her brother give her a personal servant as a present; he hesitated, but finally granted her request. The Napoko was then lifted up by the warriors, who shouted as they carried her home. The funeral thus came to an end. [78]

All Mossi potentates tried to emulate the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou in matters of pomp, ceremony, and government." Their courts were inferior to his, but only because they were less powerful and less wealthy.

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

631 51

642 Some of the more important rulers, such as the heads of the Yatenga, Fada-
 643 N'Gourma, and Tenkodogo kingdoms, were chosen by local electoral col-
 184 leges, which did not have to seek the approval of the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou or notify him of the choices made. Their authority, as we have seen, was supported by claims of equality with Ouagadougou. But, with the exception of the Tenkodogo ruler, they were actually farther removed from the main line of royal descent than the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou. The autonomous Dimdamba had their own electoral colleges, which in some cases were made up of men related to the electoral-college members of the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou. (For example, the Ouidi Naba of Boulssa was descended from the Ouidi Naba of Ouagadougou.) These local colleges were usually free to nominate and elect the Dimdamba without consulting the Mogho Naba, even though he ratified many nominations.³³ According to Cheron, "The nomination of the Dim of Boulssa did not become definitive until ratified by the Mogho Naba, who was always consulted by the electors and who could impose his own candidate."³⁴ This was not always true; nor did every Mogho Naba refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of autonomous provinces. Whether he did or not often depended on his strength relative to that of the Dimdamba. Once the Dimdamba had been chosen, however, they were installed with ceremonies similar to those for the Ouagadougou ruler.

631 Like their superiors, the Dimdamba had the authority to delegate power to the Kombemba and Tense Nanamse. Some of them also had the right to grant the nam to a fellow Dim. The Boussouma Naba, for instance, could grant it to the Mane Naba.³⁵ Mogho Nanamse granted such rights to Dimdamba for various reasons. They might do so on the basis of their relative strength vis-à-vis a particular Dim at a particular time, or because they admired him or were closely related to him. However, a Dim exercised sovereignty in his own name, regardless of whether he was subordinate to the Mogho Naba or to another Dim. In contrast, the district chiefs and the village chiefs exercised sovereignty on behalf of the Mogho Naba or of the Dim in whose territory they resided.

634 The installation ceremonies for the two lower orders of chiefs were not
 645 too different from those for the Mogho Nanamse and Dimdamba. For example, when the Nobere district chief died, the provincial minister for Nobere—in this case the Gounga Naba—reported his death to the Mogho Naba. The ruler then summoned one of the deceased chief's officials to the capital to report on the qualifications of all potential candidates for the nam. The provincial minister, in turn, dispatched one of his own representatives to the district to verify the reports he had received. It was only when this

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

53

It was only when this man had returned to the capital that all the nobles in the local ruling lineage were invited to Ouagadougou to press their claims. Only the dead chief's babissi went to Ouagadougou, even though all nobles subscribed to the traditional concept that "the nam does not belong to any one sub-lineage; it can be given to any nobleman." Unlike the others, these nobles did not shave their heads in mourning, thus indicating their candidacy for the nam. When they donned sheepskin cloaks and carried spears on their shoulders, they indicated that they were interested in the nam of the district.

Before a candidate for the district chieftainship left for Ouagadougou, he collected livestock, money, clothing, and grain from his friends to give as gifts or bribes to important officials in the capital. When he arrived there, he lived with friends and conducted his campaign from their home. He and the other candidates visited their provincial minister and his colleagues, the Mogho Naba, and other courtiers, giving presents ostensibly as a sign of friendship but actually with the ultimate aim of impressing these people with their generosity. These activities were often very costly; for if the Ouagadougou officials suspected that the candidates were wealthy, they made every effort to obtain as many presents as possible. It was not unusual for candidates for the district chieftainship to remain at the capital as long as "thirty-three" or "sixty-six" days before the officials were satisfied with their generosity and made preparations for the election.

The evening before the election, the Baloum Naba asked each candidate to provide a chicken and a sheep for the evening sacrifices to the namtibo. After the morning ceremony on the following day, the Ouidi Naba reminded the sovereign that a new chief had to be chosen for Nobere district. The Mogho Naba summoned the Gounga Naba and asked him which candidate had the best character and was most capable of taking care of the district—a question which shows that the Mossi never placed primogeniture above the ability to rule. The Gounga Naba had already consulted his friends about the matter, but he recounted both the good and the bad qualities of each candidate. At the same time, he hinted which one would make the best chief. He finally told the Mogho Naba that all of the candidates were worthy men, adding, "You can give the nam to any of them." The Mogho Naba then looked around to ascertain whether the other ministers had concurred in the Gounga Naba's implied choice before declaring, "I will give the nam to X, because when his [father, grandfather, or brother, used in the generic or classificatory sense] was alive, he was good to me. The ancestors would be angry if I did not give his [son, grandson, or brother] the nam." With these words the selection was made, and the ministers now prepared to install the successful candidate.

634 A man usually heard about his nomination through his "friends" (usu-
 645 ally pages) long before the Baloum Naba had received instructions from the
 [576] Ouidi Naba to summon him to the palace. Nevertheless, protocol demanded
 that he show proper humility and surprise at receiving the news, and that
 he be tardy in arriving at court. When he arrived, he was taken before the
 Ouidi Naba, who asked him three times, "Did your [father] say who should
 be his successor?" To this the nominee replied each time, "No, Nabal My
 [father] did not say who should replace him. You may appoint anyone you
 wish, even if he is a blind man or a leper." The Ouidi Naba then asked the
 candidate, "Which of the nakomce do the district people prefer?" The can-
 didate's standard reply was, "That is the affair of the Mogho Naba. The
 people will accept anyone, even a blind man or a leper." This question was
 asked three times, and each time the candidate gave the same answer. The
 Ouidi Naba then declared, "The Mogho Naba has given you the nam of
 your [father]." Upon hearing these words, the Samande Kasma (head ser-
 vant of the palace) came up to the new chief and removed his sheepskin
 mantle, while the samande-kamba took their heavy batons and chased away
 the other pretenders who, having heard about the election, had come to the
 palace. The samande-kamba then bore the new chief on their shoulders to
 the *tomboko* (a circle filled with sand in the courtyard). To the accompani-
 ment of the royal airs played by musicians under the direction of the Ben-
 dere Naba, he took sand and poured it on his head as a sign of submission
 to the Mogho Naba. The ruler's wives and the courtiers surrounded the
 new chief, raised their hands over his head, and shouted their praises to the
 Mogho Naba. Then the new chief showed his respect for all the ministers
 [576] and important men, in order of rank, by falling on his knees before them in
 the traditional Mossi salute. He then went to the Bendere Naba's shed,
 where he stood in the middle of the musicians and made a speech, the leit-
 motiv of which became his ruling title. The present chief of Nobere, whose
 name is Naba Boulga ("Well"), says that he made the following speech
 when he was nominated: "I am like a well; he who opens me will profit
 greatly." After the new chief had thus "taken a name," he came to the
 zongo to "drink the namtibo."

634 The drinking of the namtibo was the highlight of the election ceremony
 [1778] because it strengthened the link between the new chief and his ancestors
 and provided the ritual sanction for loyalty, obedience, and service to the
 Mogho Naba. After the new chief had drunk the namtibo, he called upon
 the ancestors to kill him if he should ever betray the Mogho Naba or fail to
 [641] render him homage and faithful service. This oath was the sign for the un-
 successful candidates to pledge their allegiance to the new chief. Then they

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

55

hoisted him on their shoulders and proceeded to his host's house with loud acclaim.

634

The next morning, the new chief went to the palace to pay homage to the Mogho Naba and receive from him the traditional cowries, three kola nuts, and a small jar of millet water. In the days that followed, he celebrated his good fortune at the house of the important ministers and court officials. About a week later he returned to the palace, and the Baloum Naba's chief assistant invested him with the insignia of office: a white gown, a cushion, a pair of slippers, and, most important, a bonnet—the true symbol of chieftainship. Soon afterward, the new chief asked the Mogho Naba and his provincial minister for permission to return home. He was then provided with an escort to accompany him to his district.

The journey of a new chief to his district was marked by pomp and ceremony. The Nobere Naba stopped at such districts as Toudou and Twili, where he was entertained by the chiefs and presented with wives and other gifts. Some districts he would never be allowed to visit again, and others he had to bypass during his joyful journey. The reasons for these restrictions and prohibitions have long since been forgotten, but they were probably instituted to prevent conflicts among Kombemba and to prevent the new chief from coming into contact with the descendants of the Kouritadamba of former Mogho Nanamse.

634
574

As the new Nobere Naba neared his district, he was met by a welcoming committee of village chiefs, nobles, and commoners, who pledged allegiance to him and gave him wives, goods, clothing, money, grain, and livestock. He was then taken to the Soulougre Naba, a descendant of the aboriginal Ninisi, at whose hands he had to undergo another series of rites before he could set up his new compound and begin his rule. These ceremonies were rather simple in comparison with those at Ouagadougou, but they represented a ritual re-enactment of the Mossi conquest of the district, and reinforced the status relationship between the Mossi and the aboriginal population. At the end of seven days, the Kombere Naba gave the Soulougre Naba a black cow to be sacrificed at a pool called Yarega, a shrine of the ancient Ninisi on a tributary of the White Volta River. When this final rite was over, an enthusiastic crowd fetched the chief, and the young people of Soulougre village bore him aloft to his compound. A period of celebration now began during which all the heads of villages, lineages, and compounds paid homage and swore allegiance to their ruler. This ended when the chief summoned his escort from Ouagadougou and gave presents to those who wished to return there and wives and land to those who wished to settle in his district.

634
[641]
[431]
[988]

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

634 The Kombere Naba, as the person who had "eaten the nam" of the district, was infused with some of the power and authority of the Mogho Naba and had the right to use force to maintain this power and authority. He was [576] respected, and people uncovered their heads and removed their slippers in his presence. Unlike the Mogho Naba, the Kombere Naba was permitted to eat with his peers. But whenever he drank the musicians made a roar-like sound with their instruments, and when he sneezed his attendants clapped. These rituals were rigidly adhered to because the Kombere Naba was readily accessible to the populace and might easily have lost their respect if he behaved in an undignified manner. He emphasized his social distance from them by never visiting the market place, and he did not go anywhere without a large entourage.

The Kombere Naba performed ceremonies and duties that were similar to but simpler than those of the Mogho Naba, and he was surrounded by officers bearing the same titles as those in the capital. But, as will be shown later, these officials had fewer and sometimes different duties than the courtiers at Ouagadougou. Some district chiefs had as many pages and wives as the Mogho Naba, but this was as much a result of their own desires as of their popularity with the local people. The death and funeral rites of a [766] district chief were not as elaborate as those of a Mogho Naba. They included [788] the circumambulation of the chief's compound by the principal heir and heiress, the symbolic reign of the Napoko, and the banishment of the Kourita.⁴¹

634 Every district chief, whether a Mogho Naba's vassal or a Dim's subordinate, was empowered to bestow the nam on his own subordinates. These [778] might be other district chiefs; but most often they were village chiefs. The [622] circumstances under which a Kombere Naba received the authority to grant the nam to another Kombere Naba were usually complex and sprang from rebellions and dynastic changes. Once granted, this authority was seldom revoked, but the district chief had to report to his immediate superior, a Mogho Naba or Dim, whenever he wished to confer the nam upon another district chief.

634 In some cases the Mogho Naba invested a district chief himself, and [175] afterward placed him under the control of a neighboring district chief. For [669] example, the chiefs of two districts, Vooko and Nobila, were always installed [778] by the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou, but were supervised by the Nobere district chief. This practice dates back to the civil war involving Mogho Naba Sagha I (ca. 1787-1803), in which chiefs of Vooko and Nobere sided with the loser. The Mogho Naba executed the local rebels and placed one of his sons in Nobere. He then divided Vooko into two districts, placing a younger son in the one he called Nobila (little Nobere) and subjecting him

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

to the control of his brother at Nobere. The other district, still called Vooko but now half its former size, was given to a descendant of its deposed ruler. The relationship between these two rulers and the Nobere Naba was that of vassals and lord. They did not stand up in the presence of the Nobere Naba, but knelt or sat on the ground and uncovered their heads in respect to him. The Nobere Naba traditionally appointed the village chiefs in the Vooko and Nobila districts; however, he sometimes granted that right to the two district chiefs. Furthermore, the traditional provincial administrator could not transmit any orders to those two district chiefs without first notifying the Nobere Naba. In their everyday affairs the two chiefs were autonomous, but the Nobere Naba could challenge and countermand all their actions. Actually, he did seem to exercise greater control over Vooko than over Nobila. One may even say that the relationship between the Nobere district chief and the Vooko chief was like that between the Mogho Naba and his district chiefs, and that the relationship between the Nobere Naba and the Nobila Naba was comparable to the one between the Mogho Naba and the Dimdamba. We have seen that the Dimdamba claimed equality with the Mogho Naba because of their alleged descent from a putative common ancestor. The Nobere Naba was actually more closely related to the Nobila Naba than to the Vooko Naba, and his behavior toward them reflected this fact. In both cases, the relationships involved were determined by the concept of joint possession of the nam by the ruling family.

A district chief was not required to notify his superior when he wished to confer the nam upon a village chief. In this choice he was completely autonomous and subject only to tradition. The fact is that on the district and village levels, traditions were more frequently modified in the face of practical political and socio-economic considerations. This occurred primarily because the district chief had closer relations with persons who possessed goods and services or who controlled them directly than did the chiefs on higher levels. Secondly, he was often under great temptation to allow presents or bribes to affect his choice of subordinate chiefs.

When a Tenga Naba died, the district chief permitted control of the village to revert to its Tengesoba. If there was none, the village was "given" to the eldest man among the aboriginal Ninisi lineages or to the eldest member of the ruling lineage segment. However, none of these persons was considered anything but a trustee of the village, and even when the trustee was a potential candidate for the nam, the Mossi did not feel that this man had any advantage over his competitors. Whoever held control of the village was held responsible for its affairs by the district administrator until the new chief was elected.

Competition for chieftainship on this level was very keen because of the

57 634

175

669

778

634

778

[622]

[631]

634

778

622

[662]

634

622

[793]

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

634⁵⁸
 622 greater number of lineage members eligible for the nam and the shallow genealogical depth. Every man who had the ability or desire to rule was encouraged to seek the post. Many candidates tried to impress the district chief and his advisers with their good qualities; most tried to bribe them. 634
 622 Since the candidates could not openly seek the post during the day, they 662
 662 visited the important officials of the district at night, taking money and cattle as presents. Some candidates even promised wives. The intrigues on this level, such as seeking the friendship of pages to find out about the activities of rivals, paralleled those at Ouagadougou. The more gifts a candidate gave the district chief, the more his rivals tried to surpass him. Consequently, the district chief often kept the office vacant for months or even as long as two or three years in order to enjoy these lucrative gifts. Neither the caretakers of the village, who complained about the administrative problems of a village without a chief, nor the Tengsabadamba, who declared that without the permission of a chief they could not make sacrifices to help the people avoid illness, drought, and sterility, could force the Kombere Naba to name a new village chief. Only when the candidates had exhausted most of their wealth was the process to elect the chief set in motion.

634 The district chief had a better knowledge of the character of candidates
 622 for the village chieftainship than the Dimdamba or Mogho Nanamse had about the men whom they selected. The district chiefs were better able than other Mossi rulers to obey the dictum that only those men capable of "keeping" the country should rule. Nevertheless, before making a choice, the Kombere Naba called in the local minister responsible for the village in question and discussed with him the character and capabilities of the various candidates.⁵⁹ As on higher levels, the eldest son of the former chief

651 was usually favored, especially if he had sent a large *sado* (death tax) to
 662 the district chief and had been generous to him during the interregnum.

662 But it was also possible that one of the dead chief's younger sons or one of his brothers or uncles might be chosen. In some cases, the district chiefs
 613 chose men from related sub-lineages that had not held the nam for generations. One district chief chose a man who had lived away from the village for thirty years. He had gone to live in his mother's brother's village as a young man and did not return until he was named chief. Admittedly, such cases were exceptional, but they kept alive in the minds of the local people the concept of the Mossi lineage's corporate possession of the nam.

On the day chosen for the election of a village chief, all the candidates with their unshaved heads and sheepskin mantles reported to the village
 431 administrator's house along with all the other men of their lineage. They gave him presents, and he led them to the compound of the district chief.

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

59

The entire assembly saluted the district chief, and the official declared the reason for his visit. Then the district chief sent a page for a chief's bonnet, which he gave to a samande. This youth took the bonnet, came up to the kneeling candidates, and jokingly attempted to place it on the head of each one in turn while asking, "Whom did the *keema* ["dead person"; in this case, the dead chief] say should be chief?" When no one answered he gave up the game, ran to the successful candidate, and placed the bonnet on his head. As soon as this happened, all the unsuccessful candidates and men of the lineage ran away, followed by other samande-kamba, who waved big clubs and feigned violence if they should catch them. The men of the lineage soon returned while the new chief did homage and pledged allegiance to the Kombere Naba by prostrating himself on the ground and by putting sand from the tomboko on his head. By this act the Tenga Naba became the district chief's subordinate and the lowest elected official in a ruling hierarchy that extended from the Mogho Naba down to the least village chief. [634] [622]

Once the oath-taking ceremony was over, the new chief's followers saluted the district chief, lifted their new leader onto their shoulders, and bore him triumphantly back to his village, shouting for joy. Here, in imitation of his superiors, the new chief made a speech in which he ridiculed his competitors, reviewed his background, and made known his chiefly intentions. Here, too, the people seized upon some significant point in his speech as an indication of the name "he had named." However, this name was seldom used, since people referred to him as the Naba of such-and-such village, e.g., Barkago Naba, and addressed him simply as "Naba." The village Tengesoba then performed propitiatory sacrifices to the Ninisi ancestors and to the local earth deity in the chief's name, and "gave him back the village" of which he had been the temporary caretaker. Only after these rites had been performed could the chief assume command of the village without incurring supernatural sanctions of the ancient Ninisi. [537] [551]

The typical village chief had no court. His compound was only slightly larger than that of a village family. He had no officials, but some of his companions who assumed special duties similar to those of the Ouidi Naba and the Tansoba were sometimes jokingly referred to by these honorific titles. The village chief had neither soghondamba nor samande-kamba, and he permitted his wives to serve refreshments to his visitors. In general, everything was on a smaller scale than on the district level, including all ceremonies even to the burial of the village chief. [622]

ADMINISTRATION

643
64266

631 ture, offers what is probably the best analysis of power relations among the
628 important Mossi chiefs. In commenting upon the Mogho Naba's inability
174 to stop the war between Yako and Yatenga he asks, "How could it be
114 otherwise? With what sanctions could this king without an army back up
his orders if he ventured to give any? . . . In short, when the Ouagadougou ruler speaks, he is sometimes obeyed. If he is, all is well; if he is not, all is still well. Everything remains as before."¹⁸ Crozat was mistaken if he believed that the Mogho Naba did not have a fighting force. What he did not have was a standing army to exercise his power whenever he wished. When he was able to summon an army, he was effective; when he was not, he had little power over any territory but his own. Crozat, like Binger, gives a strange picture of the political relationship between the Mogho Naba and the other rulers. He tells us that in the Mossi political hierarchy, "after the ruler of Ouagadougou comes the ruler of Boussouma, then the Yatenga ruler, and then the ruler of Yako."¹⁹ Yatenga was traditionally independent of Ouagadougou, whereas Boussouma and Yako were simply autonomous principalities dependent on the Mogho Naba. It is possible that Crozat mistook the relative power of these various political entities for a hierarchical relationship. It is also possible that at the time of his visit, the Dimdamba felt sufficiently powerful to ignore the traditional hierarchy as far as their political relationship with other rulers was concerned, and were simply acknowledging relative gradations of power.

643 Clearly, the sovereignty of the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou over the
642 independent kingdoms and autonomous principalities depended chiefly on
628 military might. The stronger a Mogho Naba was, the more actively he tried to control the internal administration of the autonomous principalities and to exercise police powers over them or on their behalf. However, most Mogho Nanamse were content to claim superiority or control over the independent kingdoms and refrained from meddling in their affairs.

643 Within the Mogho Naba's own kingdom, however, the situation was
635 different. Here, like other important Mossi rulers, he directed the administrative apparatus. For administrative purposes, the kingdom of Ouagadougou was divided into five large provinces (*weto*; sing. *weogho*; or [642] *solem*, from *so*, "command"). Together they included some three hundred [161] districts, in which there were over four thousand villages inhabited by some 862,000 persons.²⁰ (Not included here were districts and villages directly administered by the Mogho Naba.) The provinces were not compact physical entities, because their component units were scattered throughout the country. To be sure, some of the districts within a province were close together or even contiguous, but many others stood alongside districts be-

ADMINISTRATION

longing to other provinces. Provinces also differed with respect to the number of districts they included and the nature and size of these districts. Some provinces were larger than others; some were wealthier; and some were more difficult to administer.

Each province was administered by a governor, who also functioned as an important minister at the court of Ouagadougou. In the order of their importance, these governors were the Ouidi Naba, the Larhalle Naba, the Gounga Naba, the Baloum Naba, and the Kamsaogho Naba. Smaller administrative units (both districts and villages) were under the direct control of the Mogho Naba himself, or under the supervision of his relatives or lesser officials. None of the governors were nobles or descendants of Ouedraogo and Oubri, but their positions were hereditary. According to one tradition, the first provincial administrators were personal slaves of the early Mossi rulers who were given the task of supervising the activities of district chiefs of noble status. Another, more romantic tradition is that the man who became the first governor or Gounga Naba was a companion of Mogho Naba Oubri during the conquest of Ouagadougou. Later, the Gounga Naba presented one of his friends to Oubri with the request that the man take precedence over him, be made chief governor, and be given the title of Ouidi Naba. Oubri allegedly acceded to this request, and later granted another request of the Gounga Naba that a friend of the Ouidi Naba be named Larhalle Naba and be made the second governor. The Gounga Naba told the Mogho Naba that he preferred to see his friends happy and that he was content to be third minister. This tradition does not state when or how the Baloum Naba and the Kamsaogho Naba were named governors.²¹

With the exception of the Kamsaogho Naba, who was a eunuch and had no heirs, the provincial governors headed administrative lineages. These lineages provided administrators not only for Ouagadougou but also for the principalities and districts. Cheron states that the Ouidi Naba of Boulssa was "a descendant of the Ouidi Naba of Ouagadougou, a great dignitary who rules a province and sits among the electors of the Mogho Naba."²² Many administrative lineages on the district level were descended from officials sent down by the Mogho Naba with a new district chief in lieu of one deposed. When a chief was deposed, his administrators, like his relatives, lost their importance and their ties to Ouagadougou.

The Ouidi Naba, called *Moss' ba* ("father of the Mossi") and *Sida soba* ("master of the truth"), was the principal administrator and the prime minister. His titles undoubtedly sprang from his important role in the election of the Mogho Naba and from his position as caretaker of the king-

645 dom during the interregnum.²² The latter task was especially suited to a
 prime minister, since the Mossi regarded the interregnum as the most diffi-
 cult period in their political life. The Ouidi Naba's administrative tasks
 645 were considered so important that he never went to war and was theoretic-
 643 ally immune from punishment or execution by the Mogho Naba. This
 [203] immunity was necessary, because the Mogho Naba had the right to execute
 anyone who brought him unwelcome news, and often did so. Since the
 Ouidi Naba announced good news as well as bad, it would have been folly
 to subject him to this rule. Some reports in the French colonial archives
 [195] state that the Mogho Naba was expected to follow the Ouidi Naba's ad-
 vice at all times, and could not veto any of his actions. These reports add,
 moreover, that if a Ouidi Naba considered a Mogho Naba dangerous for
 the welfare of the country, he could rightfully compel the ruler to kill him-
 self. According to Lambert, one Ouidi Naba known as Baba forced Mogho
 [762] Naba Karfo (ca. 1800) to commit suicide. It appears that aside from waging
 a long and unpopular war against Naba Djighima of Lalle, this Mogho
 Naba had seized the riches of his wealthy subjects for distribution among
 the poor. Moreover, he allegedly dispensed justice without making much
 distinction between nobles and commoners, which so displeased the nobles
 that they encouraged the Ouidi Naba to put Karfo to death. Baba sent the
 sovereign a poisoned arrow and a message consisting of a single word: *ki*
 (die). Karfo allegedly committed suicide that very night.²⁴

Thus, it appears that under certain conditions the prime minister could
 impeach his "all-powerful" sovereign. We cannot assume, however, that
 all prime ministers were sufficiently powerful to control the Mogho Naba.
 Many Mogho Nanamse limited their Ouidi Naba to merely giving advice
 on affairs of state and insisted that he concern himself solely with his own
 province.

● 634 The provinces administered by the five ministers were made up of
 635 smaller entities or districts. The districts in the provinces of the Ouidi
 645 Naba, the Larhalle Naba, and the Gounga Naba were ruled by the sons
 and other descendants of ancient Mogho Nanamse. The province con-
 trolled by the Kamsaogho Naba was more important. His districts were
 the wealthiest and among the most populous in the nation, and they brought
 the largest revenues to the Mogho Naba. The reason for this, of course, was
 [768] that the Kamsaogho Naba was a eunuch and had no heirs; when he died,
 all his riches reverted to the Mogho Naba. The province controlled by the
 Baloum Naba was the most difficult to administer. Its districts were ruled
 by the sons of recent Mogho Nanamse who felt that as holders of the nam
 they were free to appropriate the goods of the population. The Baloum

ADMINISTRATION

Naba was responsible for checking these depredations, but he had little coercive force since these nobles were infinitely superior to him in rank. ⁶⁹ 634 635 645

The Mogho Naba held his five ministers responsible for the administration of the districts within their provinces. Therefore they had to function as liaison officers between him and the district chiefs. Every morning, in order of precedence, the ministers reported the news they had received from their provinces since the previous day. At this time, the Mogho Naba also gave them messages for their districts. Later in the day, the ministers presented to the ruler those persons who had come from their provinces to the capital with special grievances, requests, or gifts. Delicate affairs of state were left for the evening, when they were discussed by the Mogho Naba, his minister or ministers, and other important persons.

From all reports, these administrative affairs kept both the ministers and the Mogho Naba quite busy. Binger, who could barely conceal his displeasure with Mogho Naba Sanum, gives this critical but otherwise highly illuminating view of the Mossi ruler's administrative activities: ⁶⁴³ 644

The duties of Naba Sanum are not too important. They consist of receiving visits throughout the day. In the morning, at about six o'clock, the drums announce that the ruler has arisen. When he has washed and refreshed himself with a meal, his captives and his wives go to his chamber to salute him. Then comes the turn of strangers, people of the neighborhood, petitioners, and others. They squat before the reception area until the ruler deigns to appear. When a large number of people have gathered, one of the [pages] goes to notify the ruler, who then arrives, sits on his cushion, and casts an amiable glance on the gathering while all present snap their fingers. As soon as Naba Sanum is seated, the petitioners and visitors hurry toward the monarch, throw themselves face down on the earth, and cover their heads with sand. Then each of them gets up and presents a gift of greater or lesser importance, in cowries or foodstuffs, according to what he wishes to ask. Then the [pages] come and say to the ruler, "A certain man has brought a sack of cowries, or a goat, or an ox. He desires to speak to you." The ruler thanks all of them with a *nif kende* (thanks) and retires into his chamber. It is well known that not one out of fifty petitioners was given the opportunity to have his wishes heard. Those who were heard had first spoken to an attendant who, after being paid in advance, had put off their case indefinitely by stating that it would be dealt with next. . . . Since the monarch's days are so well filled, one easily understands why he finds it difficult to deal effectively with the internal and external affairs of his kingdom; in any case, Mossi country is in a period of decadence that will only be aggravated with time.²⁸ [662]

The activities Binger considered frivolous were, on the contrary, important for the proper administration of the kingdom. The Mogho Naba had to receive petitions from the districts and transmit administrative orders to ⁶⁴³ [114]

ADMINISTRATION

643 his people. We shall see that these orders ran the gamut from demands for soldiers, tribute, and labor, to requests for sacrifices to the ancestors or to local deities for the welfare of the country.

635 The provincial governors seldom visited the districts under their control

645 more than once or twice a year. They transmitted official orders to the districts through retainers. Some ministers such as the Gounga Naba kept the
[203] sons and servants of district chiefs in the capital to be used as messengers.

634 The district chiefs, in turn, used their sons or servants to transmit messages to their provincial governors or through them to the Mogho Naba. The use of intermediaries in the administration served another purpose: it prevented face-to-face contact, with all its potential for personal animosities, from impairing relations between those whose status depended on their political office and those whose status was derived from membership in the royal lineage.

635 Relations between the provincial ministers and the district chiefs were often charged with hostility and suspicion. The district chiefs regarded the

645 provincial ministers as representatives of the Mogho Naba, and thus as
634 persons to be obeyed. Simultaneously, however, they resented this control

578 by social inferiors. They felt that since they were the descendants of Ouedraogo and Oubri, they should receive orders only from the Mogho Naba himself. Thus, while the district chiefs accepted orders from their provincial governors, they never permitted them to forget their social status or to interfere with the internal affairs of the districts. They felt that this was the prerogative of the royal lineage. Most provincial ministers accepted these restrictions on their activities, but nevertheless saw to it that the district chiefs surrendered the goods collected for the Mogho Naba and governed their people well. Sometime in the 1920's, a provincial administrator went to a district and insulted its chief for failing to deliver the quota of millet set by the French colonial government. The accusation of laziness and embezzlement so infuriated the district chief that he asked the provincial minister whether he had taken leave of his senses and forgotten to whom he was speaking. The person who reported this incident said that if the district chief had not been restrained, he would have killed the administrator on the spot.

Both provincial administrators and district chiefs could impose indirect sanctions on each other if the bounds of propriety were overstepped in either direction. A district chief harried by his minister could not complain directly to the Mogho Naba. But he could, and often did, show his dissatisfaction by lodging with another provincial minister when he went to the capital. He would then ask the official to accompany him when he went

ADMINISTRATION

71

to render homage to the monarch. This attracted the attention of the Mogho Naba, who investigated the grievance of the district chief. If the provincial minister were found to be in serious error, he might be deposed and executed. The Ouidi Naba was theoretically exempt from such punishment, but it is doubtful that a strong monarch would have allowed even this official to cause trouble. 635 645 634 578

A provincial governor dissatisfied with a district chief under his charge could, under certain conditions, have him deposed and put to death. He achieved this by complaining to the monarch that the chief was either withholding tribute or misgoverning his people. In most cases, however, the minister could curb the district chief by hinting that his son would not receive a recommendation as successor to the name of the district. This was usually enough to win the cooperation of the most recalcitrant chief, if only because his future status as the honored ancestor of a ruling local line would be jeopardized if he rebelled. These sanctions were thus sufficient to ensure satisfactory relations between the provincial ministers and their district chiefs, at least on the surface. This was to the advantage of both groups, since in the final analysis the failure of either to administer or rule well might result in the death penalty. [687]

Many districts and villages in Ouagadougou were administered not by the provincial ministers but by officials directly responsible to the Mogho Naba. The districts in question were often ruled by close relatives of the Mogho Naba or by persons who had gained his good graces. The villages were often inhabited by slaves and governed by headmen who were themselves slaves. Like the other territories of the Mogho Naba, these districts and villages were not physically contiguous. The districts were mixed in with districts administered by the provincial ministers, and the villages stood within the territorial boundaries of district chiefs. Whenever the Mogho Naba wanted to communicate with a chief of such a village or district, he sent one of his retainers. The chiefs, in turn, used their own people to send messages and goods to Ouagadougou. The general administration of these districts and villages differed little from that of the territories administered by the provincial ministers. The main difference was that the Mogho Naba took a greater interest in their everyday affairs. This called for greater efficiency on the part of local officials; for they, like the other chiefs, faced the penalty of deposition and death for maladministration. [567] [203]

Of all Mossi officials, the district chiefs had the most difficult administrative task. They were in direct contact with the people, and thus ran a greater risk of being charged with misgovernment. Countless district chiefs were deposed and executed because they had allegedly disobeyed or rebelled. 634 [687]

ADMINISTRATION

- 634⁷² against the Mogho Naba. I say "allegedly" because it was never quite clear
 687 whether the district chief was at fault or whether the Mogho Naba wanted to replace him for dynastic reasons. For example, Tanga, a district chief, was accused by Mogho Naba Sanum (1850-90) of withholding tribute and of maladministration. The Ouidi Naba who administered Tanga's district advised him to prove his innocence by making a sacrifice on Naba Oubri's tomb, and then go to Ouagadougou and ask the Mogho Naba's forgiveness.
- 634 Tanga agreed to do so. But it appears that the Mogho Naba, who wished
 687 to place his own father's brother in Tanga's place, did not want a reconciliation. He waged war on Tanga, and seized his relatives, retainers, and
 662 cattle. Tanga tried to regain his losses by appealing to his provincial minister, but the minister told him that the Mogho Naba had distributed the livestock and had sold the people to Hausa traders. Moreover, he informed Tanga that he could not help him because the Mogho Naba could do as he
 [669] pleased. Tanga thereupon decided to take matters into his own hands. He successfully attacked the Mogho Naba's villages, and was still a rebel when the French arrived shortly afterward.²⁶
- 634 Tanga's action was unusual, for district chiefs seldom risked rebelling
 687 against the Mogho Naba when accused of maladministration. In 1895, for example, Koabga, chief of Doulougou district in the province of the Gounga
 669 Naba, took poison rather than wage war when Mogho Naba Wobogo accused him of misgovernment. Usually, a district chief who disobeyed an order of the Mogho Naba was summoned to the capital to answer the charge of lese majesty. If he was found guilty, the ruler knocked the bonnet off his head, thus deposing him, and had him strangled. The Mossi seldom
 [762] spilled royal blood. A district chief who refused to go to Ouagadougou could either kill himself (traditionally by taking arsenic) or resort to civil war.²⁷ If he chose suicide, he was given an honorable burial as though he had died naturally. If the Mogho Naba sent down an army, however, the offending chief was invariably killed. His compound was burned, his slaves and cattle were seized, and his allies and immediate relatives were compelled to flee. The strength of this tradition is borne out by Tanga's case. He had successfully resisted the attempts of two Mogho Nanamse to bring him to heel, and was still at large when the French conquered the country.
- [648] But Ouidi Naba Koabga, who had deserted his sovereign and selected Kouka Koutou as Mogho Naba under French orders, had not forgiven Tanga. When the French asked him what additional steps they should take to pacify the country, he asked them to capture Tanga. The unfortunate district chief was captured, placed on an unsaddled colt, and taken to Ouagadougou, where he was ignominiously executed.²⁸

ADMINISTRATION

73

The district chief was relatively secure in the control of his territory as long as he maintained amicable relations with his immediate superiors and administered his district to their satisfaction. A less important but more constant source of concern was his relationship with neighboring chiefs. Many people who can remember the pre-conquest period say it was unsafe for a man to trespass into another district unless he was on an official mission from his chief to another chief. It appears that most of the fighting occurred over strayed cattle and stolen women, with constant raids and counter-raids. The cattle were eaten, and the women kept as wives. Captured men were sometimes sold as slaves, but more often were held for ransom. They were not kept as slaves, since the Mossi were forbidden to enslave other Mossi. Needless to say, this fighting was frowned upon by the Mogho Naba. Since all district chiefs believed in their common descent from Ouedraogo and Oubri and paid allegiance to the Mogho Naba, any fighting among them was not only a sin against the ancestors but also an act of disloyalty to the Mogho Naba. When (as was usually the case) this fighting was of short duration and few people were killed, the Mogho Naba took no official notice of it. But when it became serious, he sent the provincial administrator to stop the fighting and to summon the dissident elements to the capital for trial. The speed and severity with which the Mogho Naba dealt with quarrels within his own realm usually depended upon his strength. At some periods in Mossi history there was little internal disorder, because the rulers were strong; at other periods, under weak rulers, disorder practically amounted to internal chaos. During such periods, the Mossi were kept together only by the bonds of kinship and religion which united them against outsiders.

The district chief maintained tight control over his own territory and took an active part in its administration. In a district like Nobere, for example, the chief was aided both by an informal council and by an administrative apparatus similar to but smaller than the one at Ouagadougou. The council included men with whom the chief had grown up, members of his immediate family such as his brothers, and a few formal administrative personnel. These councillors visited him every day, brought him occasional gifts, received gifts from him in turn, and discussed informally all matters of interest. Yet, informal as this communication was, it enabled the district chief to know what was going on in his villages. Moreover, these councillors interceded for various villages and gave the chief valuable advice in administrative matters.

The formal administrative personnel of the district included a Ouidi Naba, a Baloum Naba, a Tansoba, and lesser officials with titles identical

- 634 to those found at the court of Ouagadougou: Baglere Naba, Dapore Naba, Pwe Naba, Samande Naba, Ouedrange Naba, Raga Naba, etc. However, the officials who bore the same titles as the chief administrators of the Mogho Naba did not necessarily serve in the same capacity. A local historical event often determined which official held which administrative task. In Nobere, the Ouidi Naba and the Tansoba were the two principal administrators. The Ouidi Naba administered those villages north and west of Nab'tenga (the chief's village), and the Tansoba administered the villages south and east of it. The Baloum Naba and other officials had no villages under their jurisdiction, but performed many valuable services for the chief.

Administrative processes on the district level were not as formal as in the capital. Except on Fridays and on important occasions, the district administrators visited the chief's compound only when summoned or when they had an important matter to discuss. (Of course, those administrators who formed part of his unofficial council could visit him at any time.) Their problems differed little from those of the Ouagadougou officials, except that their personal problems were greater, owing to the intimacy of the smaller area. The differences in status between non-noble administrators and noble relatives of the district chief were more keenly felt and caused more difficulties. Whereas the provincial administrator seldom met the district chiefs, the district administrators regularly met nobles in the market place, at ceremonies, and in the course of their everyday work. The latent conflict between official status and royal rank often broke out openly. When it did, the nobles of a village would refuse to obey the orders the administrators had transmitted to their village chief. This compelled the district chief either to summon the nobles for an explanation of their behavior or to use his own relatives to transmit orders to them. He did not like to take either course of action, especially the latter, because both violated hierarchical procedure. Furthermore, when he sent a near relative to a village, the relative often demanded goods and services not authorized by the district chief. Of course, not all the nobles made the administrator's task difficult, but enough of them did to cause him anxiety.

The duties of the district administrators fell into several categories.

- [203] First, it was their task to transmit to the village chiefs orders which the
 [622] Kombere Naba had received from the Mogho Naba concerning warfare, special gifts and tribute, and nation-wide ceremonies and rituals. Second, they had similar duties toward the provincial governor and the district chief. Third, and most important from the local viewpoint, they handled those affairs concerning only the district. The administrators seldom had

ADMINISTRATION

75

difficulty discharging these duties, for, nobles aside, the Mossi usually obeyed orders from their chiefs—a fact verified by most observers. At the same time, a district chief had to be temperate in his demands upon his villagers, and could not take advantage of his obligations to the Mogho Naba as a means of personal enrichment. Similarly, the district administrators could not seek personal gain either by augmenting the demands of the district chief or by withholding part of the goods and services rendered to him. District administrators who were found guilty of maladministration or embezzlement were executed, because activities of this kind could—and often did—jeopardize the life of the district chief.

The Mossi might complain among themselves about the administrative policies of their district chief, but they took no measures against him unless he was very cruel or exploitative. A district chief who by his disregard for the people's welfare was believed to have lost the ability to "command people" jeopardized not only his position but also his life. When the people were dissatisfied with a chief, they either boycotted him or deserted their villages and migrated to another district, thus "increasing the force" (nam) of the chief who gave them sanctuary. This placed the deserted chief in a rather difficult position. Mogho Nanamse are known to have ordered the execution of district chiefs and even autonomous Dimdamba who had lost their subjects through their own fault. In 1863, when Mogho Naba Sanum was informed that the ruler of Boussoumia, Naba Zande, had been chased away by his subjects for administrative abuses and had fled to a Ouagadougou village, he had him captured and executed.²⁹ Thus, the threat that people might leave the district was often strong enough to ensure a just administration, because the district chiefs and officials depended upon the villagers not only for the economic support of the central administration but also for their livelihood and their lives.

Those district chiefs who supervised other district chiefs for the Mogho Naba did not interfere with the internal administration of the districts. The chiefs of the Voko and Nobila districts, for instance, had administrators of their own to look after their villages. But they were responsible to the chief of Nobere district, not their respective provincial ministers, for their internal affairs. Moreover, they had to follow the Nobere chief when he went to Ouagadougou to pay homage and allegiance to the Mogho Naba. But aside from these prescriptions, the chiefs of these subordinate districts administered their territories in the same manner as the Nobere chief administered his own.

The Mossi village chief had no administrators of his own to help him with day-to-day affairs of his village. However, like the district chief, he

ADMINISTRATION

⁷⁶
 622 had a group of confidants who acted as an informal council. These men
 623 included senior members of his own lineage, elders from other local line-
 ages, and personal friends. Again, like the confidants of the district chiefs,
 these men visited the village chief whenever they were not busy with their
 own affairs to talk to him about wives, crops, and village matters. Although
 protocol was at a minimum on this level, the chief had to maintain a high
 [613] degree of decorum. As a member of the ruling lineage of the district, he
 [565] had noble status and had to be treated accordingly. The non-noble village
 622 chief was also respected as a recipient of the nam. But all chiefs, whether
 nobles or commoners, were expected to lead exemplary lives lest the flaws in
 their characters as revealed by the intimacy of village life should weaken
 their prestige.

622 The village chief received his orders from the district chief through the
 203 administrator in charge of his village or through one of this official's ser-
 vants. He, in turn, used his own sons or relatives to transmit messages to
 the heads of the saghse. If the message was extremely important, the village
 chief's messenger might be accompanied by the administrator's messenger
 or by the district chief's personal representatives. The saksobadamba then
 transmitted the order to the various compound heads. This hierarchy was
 always followed because, by following it, the officials knew who was re-
 sponsible for disobeying or frustrating the wishes of the superior chiefs. As
 on the district level, the orders transmitted to the village and its sections
 dealt with such things as collecting tribute, picking fruits from the district
 chief's trees, allocating labor for the district chief or his personal retainers,
 transferring or summoning cases to the district court, procuring sacrificial
 animals for the local Tengsoba, and requesting soldiers. The village chief
 also sent his own messages to the saghse. These messages, however, dealt
 with such village matters as local sacrifices, quarrels, and court cases.

622 Misrule and maladministration by a village chief were punished either
 687 by the district chief or by the villagers. Like other Mossi rulers, the village
 chief could not be deposed and allowed to live. However, he had a better
 634 chance of fleeing and finding refuge in another district. His presence in a
 strange district did not challenge the authority of the local chief, and he
 had no opportunities to seize any of his host's villages. In fact, if the refugee
 was accompanied by a large number of his subjects, his host might even
 give him land on which to erect a new village. The proviso was, of course,
 that he should not "spoil" the district by causing trouble. If a village chief
 accused of maladministration was seized by the district chief before he could

[696] flee, he was invariably executed. If he was a commoner, he was decapitated
 or even stoned to death; if he was a nobleman, he was taken into the bush
 and strangled in secret by the district police.

ADMINISTRATION

77

and strangled in secret by the district police. If a district chief hesitated to punish a village chief whose followers had complained, the aggrieved lineage or the entire village simply took its movable property and left. This sanction does not seem to have been applied often, but its threat was normally sufficient to curb the excesses of the worst village chief.

622

687

634

[613]

[626]

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

684 offender was caught in the act, he was immediately killed. If he was merely
 [613] suspected of guilt both by his own lineage and by the lineage of the wronged
 woman, he was banished from his lineage and from the village. So swift
 and sure was this punishment that a rapist always fled if he believed he
 [847] would be discovered. The Mossi considered rape such a heinous crime that
 if the act resulted in pregnancy, an abortion was attempted; if this failed,
 [613] the child was killed at birth. Furthermore, the rapist could never hope to
 [627] return to his community, because even if the yagenga appealed on his be-
 half and his lineage forgave him, the community ban still stood.²

692 The village chief was usually aware of the torts and crimes that occurred
 622 in his village, and of how the families concerned had handled them. He
 seldom interfered in the internal affairs of a lineage, or in problems be-
 tween lineages, unless he felt that a case was beyond their legal competence.
 [684] In the case of a rapist's expulsion, community feeling usually ran so high
 that if the chief intervened, it was only to support the will of the community.
 However, when people could not settle their differences peaceably or when
 a major crime was committed within a village, the chief usually summoned
 622 the offender to his court for trial. His right to do so was sanctioned by his
 692 possession of the nam, but the very concept of the nam often made his task
 565 difficult. If he was a commoner, the nobles often emphasized their rela-
 634 tionship to the holder of the royal nam, the district chief, and objected to
 695 being tried by a commoner. They usually appeared at the village court if
 summoned, but often attempted afterward to find some excuse for taking
 their case to the district chief. They felt that their local reputation would
 prevent them from receiving a fair hearing from anyone but their lineage
 brother. Furthermore, if they were judged and convicted in the lower court
 and the verdict was confirmed in the district court, they felt that the district
 chief, in concurring with the village chief, had broken the solidarity of their
 lineage. But if they took their case directly to the district chief, they knew
 they were being judged by an equal or a superior, and that an unfavorable
 judgment would not damage their status.

622 The competence of the village chief to deal with court cases was limited.³
 692 He did pass on all the legal infractions that occurred in his village, but he
 tried to adjudicate only the minor cases. Thus, he tried cases involving
 theft, quarrels, trespassing, adultery, indebtedness, and abuse, and tried to
 [693] settle them by reprimanding the guilty ones. He sent cases involving serious
 injury and homicide to the district court, along with cases he was unable
 to resolve.

692 The district court was a most efficient and effective judicial organ, and
 634 the nature of the Mossi judicial process was most evident on this level. The

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

81

district court did not deal with all cases referred to it. Many cases, especially those concerning the behavior of women, were referred back to the village to be resolved by the respective lineages. The district chief considered it beneath his dignity to deal with such cases, and his guards ostentatiously chased away the litigants. He consented to try such cases only when he suspected that more serious trouble would develop if he did not. Theoretically, district courts could not try cases involving the death penalty, but in practice most of them did. Higher chiefs tolerated this as long as district chiefs did not abuse their usurpation of power.⁴

When a major crime was committed in a district, the case was usually sent immediately to the district court. The chief of the village where the crime had been committed sent one of his relatives with the accused or with the litigants to the district chief's compound, and dispatched another relative to notify the village administrator. The administrator either went to the district court to await the litigants, or sent his representative to meet the court-bound party on the way and question them about the case. Such parties were often very large, because the Mossi believed that a man should not go to court alone. They felt that the criminal act of a relative reflected on all of them, and that it was important for them to appear with him. To quote a Mossi proverb, "A chicken without its feathers is a very small bird indeed." Therefore, no matter how grievous his crime might be, the accused was accompanied to court by his relatives. If his own lineage members refused to do so, his mother's patrilineage was duty-bound to come to his aid. These relatives believed that they would incur ancestral wrath if they refused to help him.

As soon as the accused or the litigants arrived at the district chief's compound, a page notified him that the people of such-and-such a village had brought him a case. If it was after dark, the chief told his police to take charge of the litigants until morning; otherwise he prepared to convene the court. When the chief was ready, the page reappeared and alerted the court party, who had been milling about in the courtyard under the watchful eyes of the chief's guards. They ranged themselves at a respectful distance on either side of the chief's chair. When he appeared they arose, and when he sat down they knelt and offered the customary kola nuts, cowries, and chickens.⁵ He, in turn, acknowledged the gifts and inquired about the case. The relatives of the village chief who had accompanied the litigants reported what had allegedly happened; what action, if any, had been taken by the village court; and why the case had been brought to the district court (either because the crime was too serious to be judged on the village level,

692
634
[63]692
634
695

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

692 or because the litigants had rejected the village chief's verdict). The chief
 634 then asked the plaintiff or "the people of X village" to state their case.
 695 Someone usually spoke up, and after he had finished, the chief asked the
 defendant or defendants to do likewise. The litigants were then asked to
 produce reputable witnesses to support or refute the testimony.

[641] Witnesses had to be male, adult (to have begun to "push a beard"), and
 [562] free. Women and bondsmen had no legal personality before a Mossi court.
 [567] A slave was represented at court by his master, and a woman by her hus-
 band (and, by extension, by his patrilineage). In marital quarrels or prop-
 erty suits, a woman was usually represented by her patrilineage. Only if
 [576] she alone could give the required evidence was she allowed in court. When
 she was asked to testify, she knelt, and spoke in a high, thin, soft voice, thus
 showing extreme respect to the chief and proper deference to the court.
 Except for these restrictions, any person could be called in as a witness.
 [578] Tempers often ran fairly high among the litigants' relatives and friends
 while they gave their testimony and argued the case, but their physical sep-
 aration and their respect for the chief prevented abuse and fighting. Any-
 one who started a fight in court was liable to a beating by the samande-
 kamba.

[674] The Mossi believed that most people, given sufficient reason, would
 commit any crime. Thus they examined the litigants carefully and at great
 length in an attempt to "get behind" the offense. The district chief inter-
 rogated the litigants, but the dignity of the court prevented him from argu-
 ing with them. As a matter of fact, most of the cross-examination was done
 by the litigants themselves. From time to time, the village administrator
 and the chief's confidants asked brief, direct questions. When a woman
 was involved, the chief's Pughtiema usually listened to the proceedings
 from behind a wall and questioned her. When all the evidence was in,
 the chief either rendered his verdict without delay or retired to the zongo
 to confer with his confidants and the village administrator. He took the
 latter course whenever he felt that further discussion was necessary or that
 false testimony was confusing the issue. Not until he felt that he had the
 facts well in hand did he return to the court to render his verdict.

The Mossi did not use ordeals in court except in the "chastity trials" con-
 ducted by the Pwe Naba. Some litigants called upon the ancestors to kill
 them if they were not telling the truth; others went to earth shrines and
 drank an infusion of dust to show that they were not afraid of the spirits
 who wrought vengeance on the guilty. However, such acts were never car-
 ried out in court and thus were of no use to the chief.

640 The following case, tried in a district court in 1956, illustrates the Mossi

The following case, trial in a district court in 1956, 691
illustrates the LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS 83 685

concept of justice. To reach the central market, the people of Donse village 634
used a path that ran across the fields belonging to two of their fellow vil-
lagers, Zami and Isa. The path was normally open all year round, even dur-
ing the planting season, because neither man wished to inconvenience the
villagers. But one day the two men quarreled, and shortly thereafter Isa
announced his decision to close his path during the planting season. He
said he feared that "people would steal his growing crops" if he left it open.
Moreover, he wanted to use the path to increase his planting area. Zami
objected to what he considered an insult, and, believing that Isa had vio-
lated a customary rule, used the path. In doing so, he crushed several stalks
of millet. Isa witnessed his action, and the men came to blows. When the
village chief proved unable to reconcile them, they were brought before the
district court.

The district chief ruled that according to Mossi custom, a man could 695
close a path during the planting season to prevent people from stealing his 691
crops. But if he closed a path, he had to provide an alternative route, for no 685
one had the right to restrict the movements of others. The chief sympa- 634
thized with Isa over the small size of his field, but insisted that he provide
a path across or around it. However, he persuaded Zami to let Isa use a
portion of his land in compensation for the new path.

The chief tried to reconcile the interests of Isa and Zami with those of
the entire village. He apparently felt that reconciliation was more useful
than judgment. He did uphold the law that the right of passage is manda-
tory, but also maintained that a man has the right to protect his property
from potential thieves. At the same time, he made it clear that although a
man may defend his own rights, he may not do so by infringing upon the
rights of others.

The same principles seem to have been upheld in the following case, 691
also recorded in 1956, which is interesting because it illustrates the flexi- 428
bility of Mossi law. A man named Hammadou died, leaving fifteen cows
as his legacy. Moussa, his eldest son and principal heir, distributed the cows
among his father's other sons and male relatives, but did not give any to his
father's daughter. Strictly speaking, he was right to exclude her, because a 562
woman was not supposed to inherit any of her father's property unless he
had no living lineal or collateral relatives. In practice, however, a daughter
always received part of her father's legacy, especially if he had been wealthy.
Hammadou's daughter therefore felt slighted, and when she received no
redress from Moussa or her other male relatives, she had the case taken to 692
the village chief. He could not resolve it, and referred it to the district chief. 634

When Moussa was called before the district chief, he explained that his

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

84

691 father had given the woman a silver bracelet before he died, and that the
 428 babissi felt that this was sufficient, since she had a husband to provide for
 634 her. Furthermore, Moussa said that the inheritance had already been distributed, and that any redistribution would impose a hardship on all concerned.

695 Interpreting the inheritance law according to common practice, the chief
 691 ruled that the milk from a man's cattle was for *all* his children, regardless
 428 of sex, and that the fact that the father had formerly given the daughter a
 634 bracelet should not have influenced the distribution of the inheritance. The chief stated that the woman should receive at least one cow, and that if the defendant did not agree, he (the chief) would recall all the animals and supervise their distribution. He did not feel that he had to state the principles by which he had reached his judgment, for the consensus among the people of the district was that the heir was trying to take advantage of the law for his own selfish interests. Rather than appeal to Ouagadougou, Moussa and his babissi accepted the verdict.

671 On the basis of these and other cases, we are led to the conclusion that the Mossi felt that law and the judicial process should serve to reconcile people and to maintain what was commonly considered to be social justice.

634 Most of the cases at the district court were tried in the same manner as
 692 those cited above. Cases involving relations between men and women were
 684 the most common. This is paradoxical, because the district chief tried
 593 to avoid any involvement with such cases. For every domestic case tried by the district chief, five others were sent back to the village or lineage level. Even so, it is estimated that about 80 per cent of the cases tried by Mossi district chiefs ultimately concerned women. The most common case of this type was the alleged refusal of a woman to return to her husband.⁶ If the judge found that another man had encouraged her to leave her husband, he ordered her to return to him and warned her and the man about the possibility of serious difficulty with her husband's relatives. On the other hand, if the chief found that the woman had left a cruel husband who threatened to harm her or her relatives, he warned the husband not to carry out his threats. The Mossi had no bride price; thus, a woman's family was not faced with the problem of restitution. Sometimes, an angry husband did demand that his wife's family return the gifts (*pogopossum*, "thanks for the woman") he had given them from time to time—e.g., at funerals—and they complied.

684 Adultery cases were next in frequency at the district court. A man con-
 692 victed of adultery with another man's wife was either warned to leave her
 634 alone or fined a sheep or a goat. He was also liable to be put in stocks for

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

He was also liable to be put in stocks for 85 684
several days, and when released he was warned against visiting the local 692
markets, where he might be tempted to renew his illicit relations. A noble 634
man convicted of adultery was often merely warned or fined, since his 696
movements could not be restricted. But if a man caught his wife and another 682
man in *flagrante delicto* and killed them, his act was considered justifiable homicide (even if the slain man was a noble), and he went free. If, however, he killed the lover but spared his wife, he had to send her to the chief's household. Here she was made to perform hard work under the supervision of the palace guards until it was believed that she had reformed. A man who was experiencing difficulties with an unfaithful wife and feared he might eventually kill her or her paramour also sent her to the chief's compound for a few months.

The Mossi have always been great creditors and debtors, and cases concerning indebtedness seem to have been next in frequency at the district court. The chief usually dismissed cases of indebtedness brought against minors, because it was considered unseemly for adults to give credit or to loan valuable property to youths not yet of age. Thus, if the minor's family refused to make restitution, the creditor usually had no redress. However, if a woman borrowed property and refused to return it, her husband's lineage was held responsible. Similarly, if an adult male borrowed anything and refused to return it or to do so on time, the case was taken to the local court and eventually to the district court. The creditor was asked to supply witnesses to the loan, and if the chief was satisfied that the loan had been made under the conditions specified, the debtor was ordered to make restitution. If the debtor claimed bankruptcy, the chief ordered that his goods be seized and sold, and that restitution be made to the creditor. If the debtor was truly destitute, his relatives were compelled to pay his debts. The collective responsibility of the babissi for the debts of its members was seen most clearly in cases where men died in a state of indebtedness. The creditors were allowed to summon the debtor's babissi to court, and if proof of the debt was established, the relatives were compelled to repay. If they failed to do so, the chief's police seized and sold their goods to repay the debt.

Cases dealing with violations of civil contracts were somewhat similar. The Mossi did not believe in the axiom *caveat emptor*. If a man sold an animal that died within a week for no apparent reason, the chief ordered an investigation. If it was found that the animal had been ill when sold, the chief ordered that the buyer be reimbursed. If the investigation showed that the animal had been healthy when sold, no restitution was made. Similarly, if a man borrowed an ass or an ox to transport goods and the animal

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

686⁸⁶

- 634 died while he was using it, the owner could not press any claims. However, the borrower was obliged to sell the animal's flesh and give the money to the owner along with the animal's skin as proof of its death. Under no circumstances would a district chief absolve a man from paying the market value of an animal if he failed to return the skin. Such failure would brand him as a thief and involve an additional fine.

685 The Mossi considered theft a major crime. A thief could be killed with impunity if he was caught in the act and in the presence of several witnesses. If these conditions were not met but the man killed was known to have been a thief, the killer was fined several cows. But if he was known to have been a man of good character, the killer ran the risk of being executed. In this way, the Mossi tried to prevent any abuse of an accepted practice. The theft of grain and other foodstuffs was considered especially reprehensible, because it was held to indicate that the thief was so depraved

685 that he would not even grow his own food. During the rule of Naba Kaglere of Nobere district (1888-1906), a man called Yahiya left his own village of Donse and went to a village called Quitenga to steal sweet potatoes. The people of that village caught him in the act and shot him with a poisoned arrow as he made his escape. Yahiya died without revealing the source of his wound, and his babissi, suspecting foul play, asked Kaglere to investigate. When the Quitenga people learned of the investigation, they went forward voluntarily and reported the circumstances under which they had wounded Yahiya. Kaglere absolved them of all guilt and told the Donse people that Yahiya had deserved to die, not only because he had stolen food (which he might have received if he had asked for it), but because sweet potatoes were the easiest vegetable to cultivate.

685 A thief who was too clever to be caught in the act but who was apprehended afterwards was treated quite harshly by the Mossi court. Here, the penalty of double indemnity was often applied. A man who was brought to court for stealing a chicken or guinea hen was fined a goat or a sheep. Hence the Mossi proverb "Zou noaga ronda bouga"—"He who steals a chicken repays a goat." The thief who stole one cow had to return several. If a thief could not pay the fine, he was placed in stocks until his relatives paid for him. If they refused to do so, the chief's retainers seized their property, sold it, and made restitution. This often compelled the family of a recidivous thief to make him commit suicide. If the family would not resort to this, the district chief had the man seized and clubbed to death.⁹ Sometimes the chief sent recidivists to the Mogho Naba, who sent them to a village called Teemetenga to be made into eunuchs.⁹

563 The Mossi seem to have made a distinction between theft and pillage—
599

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

87

a practice whereby nobles deprived commoners of their property. Those nobles who lived among commoners quite often confiscated their neighbors' property. But this was not regarded as theft and was not punishable as such, although a rapacious nobleman could be sanctioned for terrorizing and "spoiling" a village. If a nobleman was caught performing an act that was considered theft, or if he was accused and found guilty of theft, he was severely punished. During Kaglère's reign, the people of a small village suffered a series of livestock thefts. One day, while the friends of a village chief were sitting with him, a dog came out of the chief's compound dragging an animal skin. The men recognized the skin as that described for a stolen goat, and decided to investigate. In the chief's courtyard they discovered the hole from which the dog had unearthed the skin. They also found the skins of several other stolen animals. The villagers took the village chief to the district chief, who found him guilty and exiled him from the region. In passing judgment, the district chief told him that he had been elected "to care for the village," but that he had betrayed his trust by robbing his own people.

According to Mossi law, willful homicide or murder was punishable by execution. The Mossi did not use wergild or "blood money," but insisted on the *lex talionis*, which they interpreted as "a life for a life." They did not believe that money or any other valuables could compensate for the life of a man, nor would they allow a slave to be executed in place of the murderer. They believed that only by executing the murderer himself could they prevent his victim's relatives from resorting to vengeance and thus "spoiling" the district or village.

A man who grievously wounded another was apprehended, bound, and taken to the village chief and subsequently to the district chief. Here he was kept in stocks in the serfs' quarter without being tried until his victim either died or recovered. If his victim recovered and the judge found that the wound had been inflicted accidentally, the defendant was fined or had his goods confiscated, but he was released. If the judge found that the victim had been wounded in a fair fight, the prisoner was usually censured and dismissed. The chief often warned the wounded man that he ought to have lived up to the Mossi axiom that a grown man is always able to protect himself. If, however, the trial revealed that the prisoner had ambushed his victim with the intent to kill, he either was fined several cows or had his entire property confiscated. District chiefs are known to have executed the perpetrators of cowardly ambushes even though their victims recovered.

If a man died at the hands of another, an inquest was held immediately. If the killing had been accidental or committed in self-defense, or if it was

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

682 found to have been justified—that is, if the victim was a thief or a nocturnal
 682 intruder—then the accused was acquitted or simply fined. If, however, the
 696 accused was found guilty of murder, he was sentenced to die, and the mode
 of execution was at the chief's pleasure. The chief surrendered the prisoner
 to his executioners, serfs who lived in the Baglere ward. They took him
 into the woods and carried out the sentence by strangulation, hanging,
 decapitation, clubbing, or stoning.

696 The perpetrator of an unusually heinous crime was often ordered to
 kill himself with a poisoned arrow. This form of execution was feared
 most, because it tested the murderer's mettle and called into play the
 [634] coercive force of his lineage if he proved to be a coward. When such an
 execution was ordered, the district chief had a poisoned arrow prepared and
 brought to the murderer's father, his brother, or his father's brother's son.

The relative gave the arrow to the condemned man, and, while apologizing
 for his painful mission, explained that the crime had to be expiated. If the
 murderer agreed to kill himself, his relatives prepared food and drink for
 [766] him while his grave was dug. Some proud and brave men helped their
 relatives dig the oblong-shaped grave required for a murderer; some even
 insisted on digging it themselves. When both the food and the grave had
 been prepared, the murderer bade his relatives farewell, took the food and
 the poisoned arrow, and went into a hut. Here he ate the food and after-
 696 ward killed himself by pushing the poisoned arrow into his leg. In some
 626 cases he had to be provided with a second arrow to hasten his death. If a
 613 cowardly murderer refused to kill himself, one of his relatives offered to
 die in his stead. He told the murderer that death was preferable to the
 knowledge that his lineage brother was a coward. What would happen, he
 asked the murderer, if he saw a relative being harmed? Would he choose
 his own safety rather than run the risk of death? The other relatives asked
 the same questions, and this subtle coercion was usually sufficient to induce
 the most cowardly man to kill himself. There are no reports of a murderer's
 permitting a relative to die for him; life would have been impossible for
 him afterward. One suspects that if ever a murderer had attempted to
 elude his fate, the district chief would have had him executed.

634 The district court also prescribed capital punishment for individuals
 681 convicted of arson, abduction, witchcraft, or lese majesty. A person con-
 [685] victed of willfully setting fire to someone's hut or crops was put to death
 even if no one was killed in the resulting fire; he was held to have
 [683] jeopardized the life and livelihood of his victims. Similarly, the rare person
 convicted of threatening the well-being of others through the practice of
 [695] witchcraft was usually tortured and killed. Conviction usually followed
 the testimony of witnesses or the confession of the accused.

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

89

The torture was seen as a punishment, and not as a form of ordeal to ascertain guilt or innocence. It was designed to cause the culprit as much suffering as possible before he died, and its harshness reflects the Mossi fear of witches and witchcraft. In one form of punishment called *koudgilga*, the culprit was sent to the smith, who tortured him by placing hot iron balls in both his hands. He was then beaten to death. Another type of punishment called *swengalenga* was more painful. A pottery jar from which the bottom had been removed was heated in a fire. Then it was placed over the head of the convicted witch and allowed to burn its way down onto his shoulders. The culprit was subsequently killed. Sometimes a convicted witch was not killed; instead, a man was sent to Ouagadougou to be castrated and sold as a eunuch, and a woman was sold outside the country as a slave.

Gross disrespect toward the chief and crimes of lese majesty were uncommon among the Mossi. These crimes were usually committed by persons who came into close contact with the chief—nobles and court retainers—rather than by commoners, serfs, or slaves. The most common form of lese majesty was adultery with one of the district chief's wives. The penalty for this was death for both violators. Anyone who dared insult the district chief at court was seized and executed. The same fate awaited those who talked about him maliciously in public or threatened to stir a rebellion against him. If the culprits were commoners, they were executed; if they were nobles, they were strangled in secret or were forced to commit suicide.

The district chief was caught in a dilemma whenever nobles committed major crimes or unlawful acts. They could not be imprisoned, and only the Mogho Naba had the legal prerogative to execute them. When a noble committed a major crime such as treason or rebellion, he was sent to the capital to be executed by slaves, who strangled him with a piece of cotton cloth. However, no district chief could allow the nobles to commit crimes with impunity, secure in the knowledge that they could only be punished at Ouagadougou. If a nobleman subverted the chief's rule by repeated acts of cruelty and brigandage, he was executed, although illegally. The executioners were the Baglere Naba and the Dapore Naba. These two men secretly visited the condemned noble, taking with them a bundle as a present from the chief. This bundle contained a new white robe in which were secreted a chief's bonnet and a poisoned arrow. As soon as the noble saw the gift, he knew that he was being ordered to kill himself. If he attempted to raise an alarm or run away, he was instantly strangled and his body was discarded in the bush. If he accepted the sentence, he was allowed to have food prepared, to eat, and then to kill himself. The chief ordered an elaborate funeral for his kinsman as though he had died an ordinary death. Thus, he was able to observe all the proprieties while at the same

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

696⁹⁰
 565 time safeguarding his position within the district and toward the Mogho
 634 Naba. For, as already pointed out, the district chief who failed to protect
 his subjects as well as to rule them was deposed and executed by the
 sovereign.

692 The promptness with which the lower courts dealt with litigations left
 662 little time for pre-trial bribery, and there is general agreement that the
 traditional courts were just. Of course, some lower chiefs were known to
 [695] have been unfair and to have taken bribes. However, they were always in
 danger of having their verdicts appealed to Ouagadougou.

695 The Mossi believed in and acted on the dictum that "the truth is at
 643 Ouagadougou." They were convinced that they could obtain justice from
 692 the Mogho Naba if from no other chief. If a man was not satisfied with
 634 the ruling of a lower chief, he was free in theory to seek a higher verdict,
 and this influenced the kind of justice rendered on the lower level. As a
 rule, however, the district chiefs did not favor appeals to Ouagadougou.
 They felt, like most Mossi, that the less their superiors knew about their
 activities, the better. Thus, the district chief used all of his influence to
 prevent cases from being appealed to the capital. Some district chiefs were
 not above coercing litigants into such abstention. They even threatened
 them with reprisals if the verdict should be unfavorable. But the greatest
 deterrent against such appeals was the expenditure of time and money.
 The docket of the Mogho Naba's court was always crowded, and the suitors
 often had to remain at the capital for as long as three months before they
 were given a hearing.⁹ During this period they often spent more money
 than the action was worth. Marc states that the word "Ouagadougou"
 means "the place where one becomes thin," a reference to the amount of
 money litigants had to spend while waiting for their cases to be heard.¹⁰

When the object of a lawsuit was the inheritance of cattle, the litigants
 sustained a double loss. As soon as they asked that the case be taken to the
 capital, the district chief impounded the cattle. While the case was pending
 he appropriated the cows' milk, and when the case was settled both he and
 the Mogho Naba received some animals. Thus, suitors were usually under
 a great deal of pressure to resolve their problems on the district level.
 However, if they were determined to go to the capital, they were per-
 mitted to do so.

The district chief always sent one of his retainers to the capital with the
 litigants. The group went directly to the district's provincial minister, who
 was empowered to hear the appeal and decide whether it should be brought
 before the Mogho Naba or returned to the district court. If he decided
 to send it to the Mogho Naba, he placed it on the docket and told the

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

litigants when it would be heard. On the day set he took his charges to court, where they waited in the company of the litigants from other districts and from the wards of the capital itself.

The procedure of the Mogho Naba's court differed little from that of the district chief's court. When called upon, the litigant stated his case, called witnesses, and underwent cross-examination by his opponents and by ministers of the Mogho Naba. The litigants were not allowed to look at the Mogho Naba while they spoke, but had to kneel forward on the ground with their faces turned away from him. The Mogho Naba himself seldom looked at the litigants and rarely questioned them. When presented with a complex case, the Mogho Naba, like the district chief, retired with his councillors and canvassed their opinion in order "to ascertain whether or not their verdicts were similar to his own." Nevertheless, he could not follow their advice. He had to make up his own mind, and when he returned to court he rendered his verdict, which could not be appealed. If those who received an unfavorable verdict showed any displeasure, they were taken outside by the palace guards and executed.

The penalties imposed by the Ouagadougou court were usually more severe than those handed down at the district level. The main reason for this was that aside from cases involving residents of Ouagadougou, the lawsuits tried by the Mogho Naba were serious ones and often had been sent to him on appeal. Moreover, the Mogho Naba's court was alone empowered to impose the death penalty within the kingdom of Ouagadougou. It should be noted here once more that district chiefs often executed criminals. But it should also be reiterated that the Mogho Naba never surrendered his prerogative to the district chiefs. They simply usurped it, and if they used it judiciously they were not penalized.

Those nobles and commoners who were convicted for serious crimes at the monarch's court were killed by the royal executioners. Moreover, in contrast to the procedure at the district court, the criminal's property was often seized before his execution. The reason for this is not clear, but it was probably related to the lack of a personal relationship between the court and the relatives of the accused, which enabled the Mogho Naba to impose a harsher penalty. The district chief, it must be remembered, lived in close association with his people and was influenced in his behavior by social relationships. Interestingly enough, the Mogho Naba did not keep the goods seized, but allowed them to be distributed among his executioners.

Crimes against the person or office of the Mogho Naba were punished with greater severity than crimes against the district chief. Any man who was seen speaking to one of the ruler's wives and who did not happen to

91 695
643
692
634

[681]

643
696
692
634

[687]

643⁹²

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

696 be related to her was tried and executed. In some cases, he was put to death
692 without a trial. Adultery with a royal wife was considered so reprehensible
634 that both adulterers were publicly beaten to death. Their bodies were
[687] denied burial and were thrown into the bush to be eaten by vultures. The
[684] Dapore Naba and the Baglere Naba seized and retained the man's property.

Men who committed treason against the Mogho Naba were usually
687 killed before they could be tried. Chiefs and nobles who were suspected of
643 treason and who consented to come to Ouagadougou for trial were deposed
692 and executed if found guilty. Those who were found innocent were
released and sent back to their chiefly duties. The sole exception on record
to this general rule was the case of Naba Yemde, a Dim of Boulssa province.

[669] He had fought and defeated the forces of Mogho Naba Sanum, and when
the Mogho Naba sent a larger army and routed him, he was treacherously
delivered to the monarch by another Dim. Sanum found Yemde innocent
of treason, but had him executed because he had violated another rule: as
the descendant of a Kourita, he had come face to face with the Mogho
Naba, thus jeopardizing the monarch's life. This exception is always cited
by the Mossi when the inevitability of execution for treason is brought up.
Actually, a person accused of treason rarely went to court. He either took
poison or died in battle against the royal forces. As a posthumous punish-
ment, his compound was burned, his property seized, and his relatives and
servants sold into slavery outside the country. Thus, the supreme penalty
[13] was not merely the death of a traitor but the permanent banishment of his
entire lineage.

WARFARE

99

tions and launched another expedition against Ouayougua. The expedition failed because of a lack of water, and the army was forced to return to Ouagadougou. The war would have continued had not both Mogho Naba Sanum and Ligidi died in 1890. 628
669
175
643

It appears that the Mogho Naba tolerated fighting among his immediate subordinates, and seldom intervened in local wars unless one of the combatants openly flouted his authority. For example, when the autonomous principality of Riziam attempted to wrest control of Salmatenga district from Boussouma province, Mogho Naba Dououlougou did not intervene. He knew that Salmatenga owed allegiance to Boussouma, but was perfectly willing to allow its ruler to transfer allegiance to Riziam. When Boussouma was on the brink of defeat, the Salmatenga Naba fled to Ouagadougou to seek asylum. The Mogho Naba sent him back to Naba Piga, the Boussouma Dim, with the request that he be allowed to live. Piga was so angry with the chief that he ignored the Mogho Naba's request and executed him. This incurred the wrath of Mogho Naba Dououlougou, and he sent an army to attack Piga. Fortunately for this disobedient Dim, the Mogho Naba died and the attack was called off.¹⁷

The reaction of Mogho Naba Koutou to fighting among his subordinates was more typical. He did not interfere in a long series of battles between the principalities of Riziam and Mane which culminated in 1866 when the Riziam people seized, imprisoned, and executed several Mane merchants who had gone to buy salt in Timbuktu. Mane appealed to its brother province of Boussouma for aid, and Riziam appealed to a Fulani chieftain for reinforcements. Before a battle could ensue, however, the Boussouma Dim, Naba Siguiri, died after drinking some millet beer, and the fighting was called off. Naba Kom of Mane then went off alone with his army, defeated the Fulani, and killed their chief, Sekki. When Ligidi (the chief mentioned above) succeeded his father, Naba Siguiri, he elected to continue the war against Riziam with the help of the Mane army, but the battle was inconclusive. The stalemate did not satisfy the bellicose Ligidi, who attacked Riziam once more in 1871, burning villages and seizing property. The Riziam people finally rallied and halted him. They ambushed his soldiers when they tried to retreat, and harried them so thoroughly that Ligidi had to call off the war when slaughter and thirst decimated his ranks.¹⁸ (648)

Similarly, Mogho Naba Sanum did not interfere when one of his own district chiefs, the Salogho Naba, was attacked and defeated by the ruler of Tema principality. Nor did he enter the fray when another of his district chiefs was attacked and defeated by the Boulssa Dim. The fighting in both 628
669
175
643
634

628 100

WARFARE

669 cases was over women. The Tema Dim successfully defended his
 175 principality against a Zittenga district chief who not only had the effrontery to
 643 demand the return of a wife who had fled into Tema but also invaded the
 634 principality when she failed to return.¹⁹ The Boulssa Dim attacked and
 defeated the Salogho Naba when he refused to repatriate a man and woman
 convicted of adultery who had fled into his district. It is possible that in
 each case the Mogho Naba refused to become involved in a squabble over
 women, but it is more likely that he refrained from participating in a local
 war that did not threaten the security of the entire country.

628 Many Dimdamba made it a practice to help each other in wars against
 669 common enemies. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Naba Zende of
 175 Tema and Naba Totoabo of Yako joined in a war against Naba Sebogo of
 La when Sebogo refused to repatriate one of Totoabo's wives, who had fled
 into his territory. The two victorious allies burned villages in La and forced
 Sebogo to flee for his life. They searched for the woman, but she was never
 found. The successors of the three rulers remained embittered by this war
 and eventually renewed the fighting. On this occasion, Naba Tanga of
 (643) Tema and Naba Sagha of Yako fought against Naba Kombase of La. But
 this time Yako and Tema were unable to defeat La and had to withdraw.
 There is no evidence that the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou took any part
 in these wars.²⁰

643 The Mogho Naba appears to have taken a greater interest in wars be-
 648 tween his Dimdamba and non-Mossi populations, and to have profited by
 175 them occasionally. When the followers of a Fulani chief named Karfo
 carried off some cattle belonging to the Boussouma people, the Boussouma
 Dim, Naba Siguiri, threatened war if the animals were not returned. Karfo
 not only refused to surrender the cattle but insulted Siguiri in his reply.
 Siguiri marched against the Fulani, killed Karfo, seized all the cattle he
 could find, and sent some of the "most beautiful animals" to Mogho Naba
 Koutou.²¹

634 Although the Mogho Naba tolerated wars among his Dimdamba, he
 669 apparently forbade the district chiefs under his direct command to fight
 578 among themselves. As we saw in Chapter IV, some such fighting did take
 628 place, but the Mogho Naba seems to have ignored it in most cases because
 of its relative unimportance. The Mossi, on the other hand, magnified this
 local fighting, which they called *tengkôm* ("civil war"), and which con-
 sisted of mere skirmishes between villages or neighboring districts, with
 few casualties. In fact, the Gounga Naba once stopped a war between dis-
 tricts after only nineteen persons had died. But as a rule, districts seldom
 if ever fought among themselves. The actual combatants were villagers

WARFARE

who fought the villagers of other districts over stray livestock, stolen goods, and runaway women, in that order of frequency.

The main reason for these inter-village wars was the lack of local mechanisms (aside from meetings of district chiefs) to deal with problems between villagers of different districts. If the district chiefs refused to meet, they could either refer the matter to the provincial level or allow the villages to resolve the problem among themselves. Many district chiefs preferred the latter course because it saved them from interference by the authorities in the capital. Besides, these problems were usually unimportant and did not pit one entire district against another. People of different districts were often bound to each other by familial and ritual ties, and did not like to fight against relatives. Only when the potential combatants were unrelated or all attempts at reconciliation failed would the people of a village (and occasionally of a district) band together, either secretly without their chiefs or under their chiefs, and go to war. In such cases, persons who had relatives in the enemy villages often remained at home.

The inhabitants of Mossi districts did band together eagerly under their chiefs to participate in slave-raiding expeditions into non-Mossi territories. This type of warfare seems to have been fairly common. Ruelle writes, "Before our [French] occupation, warfare was the chief preoccupation of the chiefs. Moreover, expeditions into Gurunsi country had as their goal pillage and the procurement of slaves for sale."²³ Similarly, Mangin states, "The Gurunsi and Busansi were frequently raided with the sole intent of obtaining slaves."²⁴ Binger gives the following description of a Mossi slave-catching expedition and the subsequent disposal of the slaves:

During my second stay at Banema, Boukary [later Mogho Naba Wobogo], knowing my aversion to pillage and slavery and fearing to displease me, sent off two expeditions during the night without warning me—one to Nabouli, and the other towards the south to Baouer'a. By six o'clock in the morning of the following day, the returning horsemen were heralded by gunshots. Soon afterwards, a line of slaves of both sexes appeared, tied to each other by a cord slung around their necks. The expedition to Nabouli brought back seventeen slaves; that to Baouer'a brought only five, along with an ass laden with salt and a little cotton. As soon as these unfortunate people arrived, they were given water to drink, and mallets were used to remove the rings and copper bracelets which they wore on their arms and legs. Then they were classified into three categories:

1. The men formed a lot destined for immediate sale for fear that they should run away. They were led forthwith to Sakhaboutenga, to be exchanged against sorghum for the horses, millet for the personnel, and gunpowder.
2. A second lot, composed of women, was kept as a reserve to trade for horses.

- 634 3. Finally, a third lot, composed of young girls and young boys, was distributed among the warriors and put into their charge. The boys will be employed until further notice as grooms to the warriors; later on, those who prove themselves useful and docile will be kept. The others will be sold at the first opportunity. The girls will be given in marriage to warriors who distinguish themselves.²⁴

721 The military campaigns of the Mossi, in contrast to their slave-raiding
643 expeditions, appear to have been well organized. When the Mogho Naba
644 felt that a war was necessary, he summoned his five provincial ministers and
701 the Tansoba to a parley. If war was decided upon, the Tansoba was given
[645] full charge of all operations. This man, chosen from a hereditary clan of
warriors who lived in a village called Tansob'tenga in Sapone district, was
listed among the Mogho Naba's courtiers but seldom appeared at court
unless war was imminent. His duties as chief warrior were considered so
dangerous that he constantly sought out religious practitioners for super-
natural aid. Nevertheless, a war minister who was good and brave was not
expected to live very long. If he did live to become gray-haired, the other
courtiers made fun of him by pretending that his graying head could only
be the result of his having carried a sheep captured in warfare on his head as
a present to the ruler.

701 Once given a mandate for war, the Tansoba collected his magico-re-
721 ligious apparatus and prepared the requisite sacrifices. He then asked the
644 provincial ministers to notify the district chiefs to assemble with their war-
riors under the leadership of the local Tansobadamba, who were often
[202] members of the Tansoba clan. When the district chiefs received this notice,
they beat their *zongagondo* (war drums), and the local administrators sent
[411] orders for men to the village chiefs. The village chiefs, in turn, beat their
war drums to summon their noble cavalymen and commoner foot soldiers,
who came armed with bows and arrows, spears, swords, and clubs, with or
[278] without iron tips. The tips of the sharp weapons were often covered with a
vegetable poison derived from a shrub of the *Strophanthus* species. Some
[411] of the men also carried guns after firearms were introduced among the
[177] Mossi from the desert region and from the coast. Many carried rawhide
[714] shields.

As soon as the village contingents had assembled and had gathered their
701 provisions, they marched to the district centers. Then they proceeded
726 either to the place of battle or to Ouagadougou. In the latter case, they
became part of the royal army and were joined by the forces of those princes
who were prepared to honor their obligation to the Mogho Naba. For
[648] example, when the French invaded Ouagadougou in 1896, the Boulssa Dim
sent his prime minister "at the head of an army to aid Mogho Naba

WARFARE

103

Wobogo. However, he did not have to intervene, because while still en route he heard that Ouagadougou had fallen.⁷⁰¹ Thanks to this type of aid, the Mogho Naba was able to gather quite a large army, a fact that contradicts Crozat's belief that the Mogho Naba was a "king without an army."⁷²⁶

The early Mogho Nanamse used to accompany their armies into the field, but this practice was later abandoned and was revived periodically only by the more adventurous rulers. (The last ruler to die in warfare was Mogho Naba Doukoupou [ca. 1800].) However, it was the Mogho Naba's duty to greet the army when it came to Ouagadougou, to beat the royal war drum, and to turn the troops over to the Tansoba. This officer served as commander in chief of the army, and was assisted by the Gounga Naba, a provincial minister, who served as his aide-de-camp. The Gounga Naba was expected to die rather than retreat in battle, especially if the Tansoba was killed. Two other ministers, the Kamsaogho Naba and the Larhalla Naba, also accompanied the army. The later Baloum Nanamse did not venture into battle, because they had to attend to the personal needs of the Mogho Naba. In early times, however, they accompanied their sovereigns into battle and fought alongside them. The Ouidi Naba never went to war, because it was his duty to look after the kingdom. He had to ensure the interests of all the people even if the royal army was defeated, the country invaded, and the ruler killed or forced to flee. The Samande Naba went to war and served as chief of the infantry. [648] [643] [114] [643] [701] [726] [644] [645]

Scouts preceded each district contingent as the army marched off to battle. Within the contingent, the younger warriors marched in front, followed by older men. It was the duty of the more experienced warriors to make sure that the younger men did not break ranks and run under the stress of battle. Behind the foot soldiers came the cavalry, composed of nobles and of the few commoners who possessed horses. Behind these came the district chief, surrounded by his own palace guard. Several heralds known as *yumba* (sing. *yuma*) accompanied the district forces to exhort them to fight. As the men marched to battle the *yumba* shouted: [645] [701] [726] [643]

Men! Your ancestors were not slaves. They were men. They were stronger than anyone else. They did not bathe with water; they bathed with blood. Do you wish to return home to drink millet water and eat bread? Never! A man does not eat bread or drink millet water; a man fights. Your ancestors were not afraid of anyone; you must not be afraid of anyone. Even if you are killed today, you must march ahead, beat your enemies, and take their villages. You must not be afraid!

Mossi armies on the march used scouts to keep a sharp lookout for the enemy or for any evidence that he was aware of impending attack. The tactics these scouts used to avoid detection, such as camouflaging themselves [726] [764]

THE ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

631 because of this delinquency, the Mogho Naba might hesitate to come to
 651 the aid of any of his vassals if a general war broke out. It is true that the
 643 Mogho Naba did not aid the Yatenga ruler when the French arrived.
 114 But whether this was because of his failure to pay taxes, or because the
 [648] French conquest of the Yatenga coincided with a civil war there, we shall
 [669] probably never know. We do know that many of the Mogho Naba's
 vassals came to his aid when the French finally arrived at Ouagadougou.
 It is my opinion that the gifts exchanged between Yatenga and Ouaga-
 dougou were not "tributary," but were more in the nature of tokens of
 friendship between two peers.

643 The Mogho Naba and his provincial ministers also received revenue as
 645 a function of their judicial roles. The nature and disposition of the fines
 692 levied against legal offenders were discussed in Chapter V. The Mogho
 651 Naba's fees came in the form of the traditional gifts the litigants gave him
 [431] even before their cases were tried. These gifts were never regarded as
 bribes, for this would have contradicted the Mossi axiom that "the truth
 is at Ouagadougou."

643 The Mogho Naba inherited all the property of the Kamsaogho Naba,
 651 and claimed all the property of district chiefs who died without close rela-
 tives. He also received inheritance taxes (*fado*) from the estates of deceased
 634 district chiefs. In collecting the *fado*, the Mogho Naba first retained the
 768 horse on which the messenger came to announce the chief's death. He
 [429] reciprocated by sending envoys with cowries and animals to be offered to
 their common ancestors at the chief's funeral. After the funeral, the envoys
 claimed the dead chief's quiver of arrows to take to Ouagadougou for de-
 posit with those of other dead chiefs. Then they demanded the *fado*, and
 jestingly told the heirs that the Mogho Naba would be satisfied with nothing
 less than "a thousand of everything" (*tusri bumbu fa*) the deceased had
 possessed: wives, slaves, horses, cows, goats, chickens, articles of clothing,
 and so on. The heirs pleaded poverty and jokingly gave the envoys a few
 old and sickly animals, old chickens, tattered pieces of clothing, etc. Eventu-
 ally, they handed out the *fado*, which usually consisted of livestock, clothing,
 food, weapons, jewelry, cowries, and even slaves. Lastly, they gave the
 envoys the chief's ceremonial horse and presents for themselves.

643 The Mogho Naba and his ministers collected a considerable amount of
 645 revenue from the traders who visited Ouagadougou and the larger market
 651 towns and village markets throughout the kingdom.* The Mossi (especially
 the assimilated Yarse) were good traders, and they benefited from their
 439 country's strategic location between the Sahara and the forest regions.
 [487] According to Barth, some six caravan routes crossed the country, linking

439 Marc, who had the opportunity to check the volume of this trade in 1904 and 1905, estimates that about 16,000 head of cattle and 75,000 sheep and goats passed through the two customs posts in Mossi country. Furthermore, he believes that since "the Mossi also supply in part the markets of Togoland and the market at Bondoukou [Ivory Coast], one may assume a minimum annual export of 20,000 head of cattle and 100,000 sheep or goats. The import of kola nuts is at least 500 tons."¹¹ It is clear that this volume of trade could not have been achieved so soon after the French conquest. We can only conclude that it existed prior to the coming of the Europeans, and that it brought the Mossi rulers a considerable income.

643 The Mogho Naba's officials collected taxes from all caravans that passed through his capital. The caravaneers also gave the Mogho Naba important gifts, and he apparently traded with them, even if always to his own profit. Binger states that Mogho Naba Sanum forced horse traders from the Yatenga and Hausa merchants to sell him part of their commodities at one-hundredth the purchase price.¹² Crozat reports that Mogho Naba Wobogo

appears to have had some business relations with white merchants who came to Salaga every dry season. He sent horses to them in exchange for silver. He claims that he had no reason to be pleased with their integrity, and that the silver they sent him contained plenty of copper. Some traders apparently came as far as Ouagadougou, bringing merchandise of German origin. There was one of them there during my stay. I was told that he was an important *marabout*, a shereef, perhaps an Arab or a Moor, for I was assured that he was very light in color. As was repeated to me several times, his relations with the king were limited to the solemn greetings on Fridays. He never entered the royal hut in spite of being an important *marabout*. He was at Ouagadougou for about three and one-half months, but he was compelled to return to the coast since the merchandise which he had brought was exhausted. He spoke no Mossi.¹³

439 All the caravans that passed through Mossi country were obliged to stop and give presents to the district officials. Those caravaneers who tried to elude taxation by going through the forest ran the risk of being attacked by local nobles, who usually confiscated their goods.

644 The Mogho Naba and the lesser chiefs had "market officials" who taxed the merchants in the markets of their territories. The officials at Ouagadougou, the Kos Naba ("sales chief") and the Raga Naba ("market chief"), were fairly rigorous in their exactions. The Kos Naba collected taxes in cowries for every cow slaughtered at the market, and also took its hump and gave it to the Nemdo Naba ("meat chief") for distribution in the royal household. He also collected taxes on every cow sold in the market, but

THE ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

64516
 566 dreds of persons lived in Ouidin, the ward of the Ouidi Naba. Some of
 567 them were related to him; others had been attracted by his wealth and by
 621 his ability to obtain wives for his charges. All of them benefited from be-
 ing attached to him in one way or another, and in return helped him to
 augment his income.

651 All the district chiefs sent women to their provincial ministers to be
 645 kept as wives (and thus as agricultural workers), or to be given out as
 634 pughsiudse. The Kamsaogho Naba received more pughsiudse than the
 434 other ministers because he was in charge of the wealthier districts, and also
 [431] of course distributed more. The Baloum Naba was especially favored in
 [464] another respect. Each year, he was entitled to call several *seghse* (sing.
seka; a corvée or convocation) of his former pages and their relatives to
 help cultivate his fields. The Ouidi Naba's sources of revenue were about
 the same as the Baloum Naba's. In addition, his position as chief minister
 enabled him to obtain numerous gifts from persons who visited Ouaga-
 dougou. Moreover, the Mogho Naba often gave him horses from the fado
 of deceased district chiefs. The Larhalla Naba had full ministerial privi-
 leges, and a few other means of obtaining revenue. He was allowed, for
 instance, to keep the animals that had not been sacrificed on the graves of
 deceased rulers.

The provincial ministers received many goods and services from the
 district chiefs of their provinces. Whenever one of these ministers sent a
 messenger to the district, the chief gave the messenger money and livestock
 for his master. Furthermore, the district chiefs brought presents for their
 minister when they paid their annual visit to Ouagadougou to render hom-
 age to the Mogho Naba. The provincial ministers used their position as
 confidants and advisers to obtain as many presents as possible from persons
 who came to Ouagadougou to ask special favors from the Mogho Naba, to
 participate in judicial proceedings, or to seek the nam. Moreover, they co-
 operated with each other in these exactions, so that a person seeking a favor
 from or through one minister was prudently advised to give presents to or
 to seek the aid of the others.

634 The district chief played a key role in the procurement of revenue for
 651 the central administration, and derived an income for himself in the process.
 423 The seigniorial rights over the Mossi people delegated by the Mogho Naba
 434 to all nam holders were quite obvious on this level. The district chief had
 rights to all valuable fruit trees, such as locust-bean and shea-butter, that
 grew within the boundaries of his territory. He instructed the village chiefs
 to harvest the fruit of these trees and send it to him. The village chiefs even
 had to send him the wood from the fallen branches of these trees.

THE ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

117

The district chiefs did not often exercise their rights over fruit trees in the weogho, as the wasteland in their districts was called. If a villager went into the weogho and collected fruit or wood from the chief's trees, he surrendered only part of it to the chief. On the other hand, if he received permission from a district chief to farm in the weogho, he was obliged to gather and send to the chief the fruit on any valuable trees. A district chief sometimes granted the rights over certain fruit trees in the inhabited areas to specific families or individuals, for personal reasons or as a reward for services. In such cases, the chief forfeited his rights to these trees, but retained his rights to the others.³³

District chiefs also controlled all the resources of creeks and pools within their jurisdiction that were not sacred to certain aboriginal families, or which had not been transferred to specific persons. The aboriginal Ninisi families always notified the district chief when they planned to perform their annual fishing rite to the earth deities. He, in turn, sent representatives to the ceremony, and they were given part of the catch as his share. Persons who were granted permission to fish in the chief's water holes gave him a substantial part of their catch, and even those persons who had private control of fishing places regularly did the same.

The district chiefs also had rights to certain parts of animals caught in their territories. This applied especially to animals caught with such traditional weapons as traps, clubs, bows and arrows, and spears. Men who had obtained flint guns and other firearms from the Ashanti or elsewhere and who had bought their own powder were not obliged to give the chief a part of their game, but it was always prudent to do so. According to a long-standing tradition, the tusk and legs of a slain elephant that were not resting on the ground belonged to the chief, and those that lay on the ground belonged to the Tengsoba in whose ritual jurisdiction the animal had been slain. But the district chief's secular power was so much stronger than the Tengsoba's sacred power that he usually took both tusks, leaving the Tengsoba only two legs. The district chief also received other portions of elephants and parts of all the larger animals killed in his territory. And when hunters in the district were successful in the chase, they usually gave him entire small animals.

Every village in a district contributed to the district chief's revenue by performing special services for him. Certain villages were responsible for keeping specific huts in his compound in good condition; others, whose lands bordered on the woods, had to provide firewood for his compound; and yet others furnished grass and other fodder for his horses. Many villages had the task of cultivating special fields and crops for the district chief.

634
651
423
434[226]
[796]224
651
634
[411]
[177]
[793]621
651
634

621 118

THE ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

651 For example, the villagers of Barkago traditionally cultivated and harvested
 634 a field of millet behind his compound for the chief. The people of Pinse,
 243 Donse, Passingtenga, and Tewarka cultivated millet for him in their own
 villages, and those of Togose and Basbedo cultivated rice for him in their
 excellent lowlands.

243 The district chief had fields both behind his compound and in the bush,
 634 which were cultivated for him by his retainers, serfs, and slaves. More than
 566 the Mogho Naba and the provincial ministers, the district chief believed
 567 that a Moaga must perform agricultural work during the planting season;
 to show his interest in farming, he often personally supervised the work on
 his plantations. When the task of weeding or harvesting proved too much
 for his own people, he asked his villages for a *sosogha*. On that day, each
 664 village chief, accompanied by his men, went to the district chief's fields,
 where, to the accompaniment of drums and chants and with the verbal
 encouragement of district administrators, the villages vied with each other
 in their task. The district chief usually sat under a tree and watched the
 465 proceedings and occasionally visited the various contingents to observe the
 progress made. Toward evening, the chief's wives gave the workers large
 quantities of food and drink in compensation for their services.

651 Like the Mogho Naba, the district chief had officials who collected taxes
 634 on commodities sold in local markets. These district market officials were
 usually serfs, Gurunsi captives, or bondsmen from other populations. Mossi
 776 rarely served in such capacities because many of the local market places were
 considered ritually dangerous, and their titular deities, the Tengkouga, were
 believed to wreak vengeance on market officials who were tardy with sacri-
 fices. The local Kos Naba supervised the slaughtering of every animal killed
 in the market, kept its skin so that its ownership could be verified if neces-
 sary, and collected taxes from the butchers in the form of meat or cowries.
 The Raga Naba of the district was not as strict as his counterpart in Oua-
 gadougou, and seldom imposed formal taxes on the traders. He usually
 walked around the market, trailed by the chief's servants, and seized cala-
 bashes of grain and other commodities, which he placed in the servants'
 baskets. The Raga Naba did not tax those itinerant traders or caravaneers
 who visited the markets in the district, nor did he interfere with them in
 any other way. These merchants usually had business and personal rela-
 tions with the chief, and he himself handled revenue from this source. The
 merchants gave him goods from the forest and Sahara regions, and he in
 turn often gave them wives, who were thus taken out of the district.

167 The Mossi district chief was always on the lookout for new sources of
 434 revenue, and thus welcomed strangers into his district because they "in-

THE ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

119

creased his force" and ultimately added to his income. Men who had been compelled to flee from other districts because of crimes or power struggles were granted refuge and given pughsiudse. In this manner, the district chief, like the Mogho Naba, established seigniorial rights over his new subjects, incorporated them into the district, and obtained goods and services from them. The better a district chief's reputation, the greater the number of refugees who sought shelter with him and added to his wealth. Conversely, a chief who was known for his injustice, his rascality, and his excessive demands from persons seeking the village nam was shunned by potential subjects and might even be deserted by his own.

Those persons who visited the district chief's compound to settle court cases also contributed to his revenue. When the case dealt with cattle or other livestock, the chief received a few animals. In other cases, he received only the customary gifts from the litigants. He also received gifts from all the families in his district several times a year. One occasion was the "Tense," a festival in honor of the mother of Mogho Naba Oubri, the founder of the Ouagadougou dynasty; the other was the Basgha. During these two ceremonies every village chief, preceded by his district administrator and followed by his subjects, paid homage to the district chief and gave him presents. The district chief retained part of what he received for the upkeep of his household and to fulfill such obligations as hospitality to travelers, and added the remainder to his own annual tribute to the Mogho Naba.

The manner in which the district chief collected his annual tax or tribute for the Mogho Naba is the subject of controversy. Several of my respondents declared that the collection of this tribute was rather informal. The district chief allegedly notified the village chiefs that he wished to give a present to the Mogho Naba, and these chiefs sent word to the family heads, who, in turn, notified every household. The village people then collected chickens and livestock, baskets of grain, and cowries, and sent them up through the hierarchy to the district chief. The district chief's retainers checked the gifts from each village very carefully, and if some villages gave less than was expected of them, the district chief summoned their chiefs for explanations. In most cases the district chief knew exactly how much could be expected of his subjects, because his informers—usually his own pages and courtyard servants, or messengers of the local administrators—kept him informed of the wealth of each hamlet. Usually, a village chief who had withheld too much from the commodities turned over to him, or who had not demanded sufficient goods from his villagers, sought to make amends. It was in his interest to do so, since it was always dangerous to incur the

651
634
167
434434
651
634
[692]
634
431
796
434
[574]
[651]634
651
434634
651
622
434

THE ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

434₁₂₀

- 634 district chief's wrath. Thus, there was some method in the collection of this
 651 tribute and certain expectations had to be met, even though many of the
 [622] contributors may have felt that their gifts were voluntary.

In direct contrast, Dim Delobson, himself a chief, states that Mossi chiefs demanded a stipulated amount from their villagers. He adds, however, that the tribute "varied in amount according to the resources of the contributors," and that the district chief set the "amount of cowries and grain due from each village in accordance with the number of its inhabitants."²⁴ According to him, the rate of assessment was usually 100 cowries for a married man and 50 for an adult bachelor (apparently, this difference was an acknowledgment of the woman's contribution to her husband's wealth). In addition, each adult male was assessed 10 baskets of millet of about 100 pounds each. Dim Delobson adds that to these exactions the district chief added his own contributions to the Mogho Naba, usually in the form of cattle.

- [114] It seems that Dim Delobson rationalized and regularized a rather informal system of contributions. The present-day Mossi declare that soil differences in the villages and variations in rainfall prevented a district chief from demanding a set tribute, because no one could tell whether a crop would be good or bad. Only a ruler's informers could tell him how much he should receive each year, and the chief based his exactions on this report. Several of my respondents agreed with Dim Delobson that the district chief provided mostly cattle for the annual tribute to the Mogho Naba, and that the village people furnished cowries, small animals, and grain.

- 634 A district chief was seldom wealthy, because he always had to use his
 652 revenue to fulfill unexpected obligations toward his subjects, his superiors
 574 in the political hierarchy, and his household. He had to be generous to his
 subjects, providing millet water, millet beer, and the more expensive imported kola nuts for those who visited and conferred with him daily. He was expected to provide food and shelter for the countless strangers who settled in his district, until they could provide for themselves. He also lodged and fed the messengers who brought him orders from the capital, and gave them gifts to take back to the provincial ministers. And he had to provide goods for the many members of his family who depended upon him. Finally, in the event of crop failure or famine in any of his villages, he had to provide grain from his granaries to feed the hungry. "How could he do otherwise? Was he not a 'father' to his people?"

- 634 The expectation that the district chief should provide hospitality to his
 574 subjects was so strong that those chiefs or princes who were deprived of
 579 an income for any reason often resorted to banditry to fulfil their obli-

434

THE ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

121 634

tions. Binger, who found Boukary Koutou (the future Mogho Naba Wobogo) living in exile for having led a rebellion against his brother, Mogho Naba Sanum, tells us:

Boukary has no resources, and does not even have the advantage of receiving periodic tribute from several large villages. In order to subsist and to maintain a certain status, he is compelled to live by pillage and even by brigandage. From time to time, his horsemen make incursions into the outskirts of some Gurunsi or Kipirsi village, and carry off by surprise the inhabitants whom they find working the fields or looking for wood. His people also hide and lie in wait along the roads to capture any persons who may pass within their range. This type of behavior has given Boukary Naba a bad reputation. However, the people who understand his position forgive him, knowing the situation in which his brother has placed him. And, in spite of all this, he has numerous partisans, and many others who would be happy to see him gain power.²⁵

Those district chiefs or princes who wished to retain their power legitimately were forced to be generous or run the risk of losing the allegiance and good will of their villagers, who were their ultimate supporters.

It is very difficult to generalize about the amount of revenue collected by a village chief. He did not receive any revenue from the land used by his villagers. He treated the weogho in his village in the same manner as the district chief. If some families grew too large and wanted to establish permanent residence in the village bush, they asked the chief for permission to settle there. However, many village chiefs had special areas of waste for their own use. They had usually received them as gifts from some district chief, and therefore had the right to collect tribute on any crops, firewood, or fish obtained from these lands.

The average village chief's main source of revenue was derived from the agricultural and other labor of his wives and relatives. A village chief received a number of wives from his subjects and from aliens living in his village. These women helped cultivate his fields. If their labor was insufficient he called a sosogha, to which he often invited his wives' relatives. Some chiefs also had serfs and slaves who helped cultivate their land and kept their cattle as well.

The village chief did not have the power to tax his subjects. Instead, he functioned as a channel through which commodities and services passed up the hierarchy and on to Ouagadougou. Many villagers voluntarily helped the chief to repair his huts and compound walls and to cut thatch for his roofs. Many gave him baskets of grain and other vegetable products after the harvest. They also visited him and gave him presents during the annual rites to his ancestors. In contrast to higher chiefs, however, the village head

● 634122

THE ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

651 did not derive any revenue from his judicial functions. He could not levy
 622 a fine against any malefactor. However, his intermediary position between
 [692] the villagers and the district chief did permit him to obtain some revenue
 whenever commodities moved from one level to the other.

634 The officials who administered the villages for the district chief received
 part of their revenue from the villages under their charge. These local ad-
 ministrators had no courts or retainers comparable to those at the provincial
 [595] level. However, they did have a large number of wives who contributed
 valuable agricultural labor. These administrators were permitted to ask the
 [464] village chiefs for sosome on their own fields several times during the plant-
 ing season, but—unlike the district chiefs—they were not permitted to have
 the villagers cultivate special fields for them. In return for any help re-
 ceived, they had to provide food and drink for the workers.

634 The administrator received most of his revenue as a by-product of active
 434 duty in the villages. When he visited a village or transmitted a message to
 431 a village chief, he almost invariably received a sheep, a goat, a chicken, or
 some millet, from the village chief. He also acquired large quantities of
 goods during the village interregnum: he received gifts from the chief's
 heirs during the chief's funeral; he received additional presents when they
 took the fado to the district chief; he could prolong the interregnum in
 order to receive as many bribes as possible from contenders for the nam;
 and he was handsomely rewarded when the candidate he had backed was
 finally installed in office.

596 The extended family was the basic socio-economic unit supporting the
 613 Mossi political organization. The Yirisoba received land rights in his saka
 622 from his Sakakasma, who had obtained his rights from the village chief.

423 An extended family in need of additional land would seek help from its
 Sakakasma or its Boodkasma. When the family no longer needed this
 land, it reverted to the lineage. If all the land granted to the lineage was
 already occupied, the extended family, through its lineage head, asked the
 village chief for more land. The chief usually granted this request, unless
 he had no more weogho available. In this case, the needy Yirisoba some-

596 times tried to borrow land from his non-kin neighbors. Such a step was
 613 not undertaken lightly, however. If a man borrowed land from his own
 423 lineage members or from the chief, the land rights reverted to its donors
 426 without difficulty. However, if he borrowed land from another lineage and
 either he or his benefactor died without assuring the return of the land, liti-
 gation often ensued. In some cases a man would seek land from his lineage
 brothers in another village, who let him use some of their land with their
 chief's permission. Some Yirisobadamba even asked their district chief for

[P.126]

VIII

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

796
[642] RELIGION AND RITUAL played an important role in supporting and preserv-
[769] ing the Mossi political system. Religio-political ceremonies were centered
[776] around the ancestors (Keemse) and the earth deities (Tengkouga); the
otiose high god (Ouennam or Naba Zid Ouende) had a very minor role.

769 The political importance of ancestor veneration lay in the fact that every
Mossi chief claimed Nyennega of Dagomba and her descendants, Ouedra-
[642] Logo and Oubri, as his ancestors. Furthermore, possession of the amulets of
778 Rialle, Nyennega's husband and Ouedraogo's father, legitimized possession
[613] of the nam. In order to rule, a Moaga had either to be a member of a royal
lineage still in possession of the nam or to have received the nam from such
669 a lineage. No Moaga ever tried to usurp the nam of a kingdom or princi-
778 pality without trying to steal the royal amulets at the same time; nor, if his
rebellion was successful, did he ever fail to claim that he had stolen the
[642] amulets or had received them as a gift. Thus Yadega, who rebelled against
769 his father's brother, Mogho Naba Koudoumie, and founded the Yatenga
kingdom, declared that he had obtained Rialle's amulets. He claimed that
they had been given to him by his sister, Pabre, who had stolen them from
Ouagadougou and had thus deprived that kingdom of any legitimate sanc-
tions for power. Thus, when the Yatenga people declare that they are equal
to Ouagadougou, they add that the only "amulets" that still legitimize the
nam of the Ouagadougou dynasty are the droppings left behind by Pabre's
horse as she fled northward.

769 Similarly, all the princes who founded principalities and proclaimed
[642] their independence of Ouagadougou defended their action on the grounds
[643] that they, being as close to the main line of descent as the Mogho Naba,
were also entitled to rule. The younger sons of deceased Mogho Nanamse
[631] who were banished from the capital as Kouritadamba and who subse-
[634] quently became provincial Dimdamba also stressed their relationship to
the royal ancestors. Even those district chiefs whose ancestors had prob-

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

137 769

ably been younger sons sent to rule in conquered territories claimed that their ancestors were direct descendants of Ouedraogo and Oubri. Thus, to the Mossi, the power to rule was intimately linked to closeness of descent from the royal ancestors. The supernatural power of these ancestors, and the vigilance they were believed to maintain over the affairs of their descendants, were regarded as important factors in Mossi government.

From the moment when the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou or any other Mossi ruler "drank the namtibo" and thereby received the nam of his ancestors, he had the right—indeed, the duty—to offer sacrifices to these ancestors in the name of his subjects. Every night, throughout Mossi country, the Baloum Naba of every ruler performed an act of supplication (Kwaga Basgha) to the ancestors. He beseeched them to protect the subjects of their descendants through the night, to maintain peace in Mossi country, and to grant health, children, and prosperity to all Mossi. This nightly ceremony was climaxed yearly by an elaborate ritual in honor of the ancestors (called the Basgha in some areas, and the Pelegha, Filigha, or Kinkiriga in others) that began at the highest levels of the government and ultimately linked every Mossi chief and lineage head.

The Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou, like the other Mogho Nanamse and Dimdamba, initiated this ceremony in his own kingdom. His celebration, called "M'barengma," was held at the end of the Mossi agricultural year and after the Soretasgho. Thus, the M'barengma was a New Year's festival in thanksgiving for good crops, as well as the annual Feast of the Dead. A few weeks before the first moon of the new year (the *ki-basgha* or *ki-pelegha*), the Mogho Naba ordered his soghondamba and samande-kamba to clean up the palace buildings and courtyards—an activity intended to notify the ever-vigilant ancestors that preparations were being made to offer sacrifices in their honor. A short time later, the Mogho Naba gave grain from his fields to the Pughtiema so she could prepare millet water for the sacrifices. Present-day Mossi insist that part of the grain came from the first ears harvested that year and part from those of the previous year. This was supposed to symbolize the continuity between crops, mirroring the continuity between the ruler and his ancestors. A few days before the principal ceremony, the Mogho Naba ordered the Larhalle Naba to pour millet water and sacrifice chickens on the graves of former Mogho Nanamse.

Shortly before the *ki-basgha* moon appeared, the ruler had to leave his palace at night to elude the ancestors, who had been attracted by the preparations and who were expected to be angry when they discovered that the sacrifices were not yet ready. The unjust ruler feared ancestral sanctions; the just ruler that his ancestors might want him to join them. One night he

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

129

climax of this gift-giving came when the ruler sent the Bendere Naba about 19,000 cowries and a slave.³ This ceremony terminated at nightfall.

The close of the Mogho Naba's Basgha heralded the start of similar ceremonies throughout his kingdom. The heads of the other Mossi kingdoms and the Dimdamba were free to hold their own Basgha when they wished; but the Ouagadougou ruler's own subjects, including the provincial ministers, district chiefs, village chiefs, and lineage heads, apparently were not. One reason for this, aside from respect for the ruler, was that the important officials' head wives had to wait for the yeast (*dabili*) from the Mogho Naba's beer before they could prepare the sacrificial offerings for their husbands' ancestors. This *dabili* went from district to district or to several districts at once, depending on whether the chiefs celebrated Basgha at the same time or successively. Thus, the *dabili* from the capital united all the wives of the royal clan, and made for both a ritual continuity in the veneration of all ancestors and a strengthening of religious and political bonds.

The Basgha ceremonies on the district level were much less elaborate than those held at Ouagadougou, but just as important. The district chief, too, had his buildings repaired and his grain distributed for sacrifices for the ancestors. A few days before the actual ceremony, he ordered the Gande Naba to pour millet water on the graves of recently deceased chiefs and to sacrifice chickens there. As in Ouagadougou, these sacrifices were offered to induce the chiefly ancestors to grant the villagers health, food, and children. Unlike the Mogho Naba, most district chiefs did not ritually hide from their ancestors for several nights prior to the ceremony. Some of them did change their sleeping place within the compound every night, and the court people always slept indoors during this period. On the night of the Basgha itself, however, the district chiefs did not sleep in their compounds.

As in Ouagadougou, the Pughtiema performed the main ceremony by pouring millet water as a libation to the ancestors who visited her hut. She was assisted by the Baloum Naba, who had possession of the namtibo. Apparently, the district chief remained in hiding and took no part in the ceremony. But he was the main figure in the morning ceremony, which differed little from that of Ouagadougou. In some districts the Tengsoba performed a public sacrifice to the ancestors. He was given the namtibo—sacred objects that had belonged to former district chiefs—and poured libations and sacrificed chickens to all of the chief's ancestors. He also prayed both to these ancestors and to his own on the chief's behalf, and beseeched them to grant long life and happiness to the district population. He also declared that the sacred objects would seek out and kill any enemies of the local ruler, wherever they might be. Once this ritual had been com-

782

796

643

769

241

[431]

631

769

796

782

[182]

634

769

796

782

634

769

796

782

634

769

796

782

[93]

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

782
769 130
796
778 completed, the remainder of the ceremony followed the pattern of the Ouaga-
634 dougou ritual.

During the weeks that followed, the village chiefs and the heads of the
622 larger lineage segments all offered sacrifices to their ancestors. The Pugh-
613 tiema of each prominent local administrator, chief, or lineage head prepared
769 and poured the millet water as a libation to the ancestors. Whenever pos-
781 sible, each of these personages invited musicians to sing praises to his an-
533 cestors. He dressed in his best robe and sat outside his hut to receive pres-
ents from his relatives, friends, and subjects, along with their best wishes
for the new year, and for long life and prosperity. In return he gave them
[182] kola nuts, beer, and food. Thus, in celebrating the Basgha, all the Mossi
were united in prayers and supplications to the ancestors, upon whom rested
the future of their country and the successful reign of the descendants of
Ouedraogo and Oubri.

796 The earth deity, Tenga, held the central place in the second major
182 religio-political ceremony which linked all Mossi. This ritual, called *Tense*
769 (from *tenga*, "earth") and sometimes *Naba Oubri ma koure* ("the anni-
[776] versary of the funeral of Mogho Naba Oubri's mother"), was so important
[648] to Mossi cohesion that it was banned by the French, and as a result its main
[173] features are now unclear. According to tradition, Naba Oubri loved Pough-
toenga, his Ninisi mother, so much, and was so pleased with the elaborate
funeral he gave her, that he decided to repeat this ceremony each year in
the hope that his subjects would be blessed with the bountiful crops and
herds which had made the first one possible. Curiously enough, Oubri's
mother was not a central figure in the *Tense* celebration. Instead, great
stress was placed on the fructifying powers of the earth and on the im-
portance of the royal ancestors in Mossi life. The juxtaposition and associa-
tion of the earth deity with Oubri's mother has important implications for
the Mossi political organization. Mossi tradition holds that a Ninisi woman
was the ancestress of the Mossi of Ouagadougou. Her people probably
[177] celebrated the *Tense* as a fertility rite to their earth goddess, Tenga. The
Mossi apparently took over the ceremony and used it both as a fertility rite
and as a memorial festival, thus symbolically uniting the conquerors and
the conquered.*

796 In contrast to the Basgha, no special date appears to have been set for the
769 celebration of the *Tense*. It was held sometime before the crops were
782 sowed, but according to Tauxier it was not celebrated at all in Ouagadougou
[645] when the previous year's harvest had been poor.* Before setting the date
[791] for the festival, the Mogho Naba summoned the Larhalle Naba and ordered
him to have sacrifices made on the graves of all former rulers. This minister

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

133 769

between the living and the dead," but also to strengthen the political bonds between the Mogho Naba and his chiefs, down to the humblest elder of a Mossi compound. 796 182

In addition to the Basgha and Tense, the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou appears to have offered another yearly sacrifice to Tenga. Each year, after the Basgha, the Mogho Naba, the Baloum Naba, and a large entourage reportedly visited a large earth shrine called Tantibo in the vicinity of Sabatenga to offer propitiatory sacrifices in the name of all the people. When the royal party arrived at Sabatenga, they were joined by the Sabatenga Naba and his Tengesoba. The group proceeded to the foot of the sacred hill, and here the monarch dismounted, took off his bonnet and shoes, and climbed the hill. He made the customary Mossi salute at the shrine and looked on silently while the Tengesoba sacrificed animals and poured libations of millet beer and millet water in supplication for the health and prosperity of the Mogho Naba and all his people. 769 796 782 643 778

When evil befell Mossi country in spite of the annual sacrifices to the ancestors and to the earth deity, the Mogho Naba had to offer additional sacrifices. If the country was plagued by drought, the ruler went to an earth shrine in Ouagadougou itself, called "Korn be paspanga" (literally, "water is strong there"), for a sacrifice. Moreover, he might order all his district and village chiefs to perform similar sacrifices to the earth shrines within their territories. In Nobere district, for instance, the district chief went to the village called Barkago, where, standing barefoot and bare-headed on the hilly shrine known as Beta, he ordered the local village chief and the Tengesoba to offer sacrifices for rain and good health. 731 634 622

It is generally believed by the Mossi that when the French attacked Ouagadougou, the deposed Mogho Naba Wobogo made sacrifices to earth shrines. Tradition has it that he sacrificed a black cock, a black ram, a black donkey, and a black slave on a large hill near the White Volta River, beseeching the earth goddess to drive the French away and to destroy the traitor Mazi whom they had placed upon the throne. When Mazi died, the Mossi people believed that he had received his just deserts from the earth shrine for treason. The French believe that Mazi was poisoned. 648 782

The district and village chiefs, like the Mogho Naba, were required to make propitiatory sacrifices to the earth shrines on behalf of their subjects. Before taking office, a district chief was ritually shown the major earth shrines in his territory, and he could not ignore their existence and their need for sacrifices. In a country with major local variations in rainfall and localized animal and human epidemics, the Tengesobadamba of stricken areas always called upon the local chiefs to help them propitiate disgruntled spirits. 634 622 782 793

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

634¹³⁴

622 spirits. The chiefs could not refuse such requests, especially when the vil-
 782 lagers were poor, because they were regarded as "fathers of their people."

661 In some cases, however, district chiefs had to protect their subjects against
 793 unscrupulous Tengsobadamba who took advantage of local crises and tried
 634 to prey upon the villagers by refusing to perform the requisite sacrifices

793 unless they received substantial gifts. The ensuing struggle was between
 634 the secular and the sacred; between the chief as a representative of the con-

782 querors, and the Tengsoba as a member of the conquered group. It was
 always resolved in favor of the Mossi chief, who never permitted his Teng-
 sobadamba the same privileges held by religious practitioners in neighbor-
 ing societies.⁹ The Mossi chiefs recognized that they needed the Tengsoba-
 damba, and many myths recount how invading Mossi chiefs went into the
 woods where the Tengsobadamba were hiding to beseech and eventually
 force them to return to their districts so that sacrifices might be continued.
 On the other hand, the Mossi chiefs always insisted on the primacy of the
 nam over any other power. They employed the Tengsobadamba to inter-
 cede with Tenga for the welfare of their subjects, but they never allowed
 the priests to control them.

771 The coming of Moslems to the kingdom of Ouagadougou had little

795 effect on the way in which the Mogho Nanamse used the traditional reli-

643 gious system to bolster their political power.¹⁰ In fact, the Mossi rulers later

used Islam and its adherents in the same manner as they had used the

[797] aboriginal religion. The Moslems first tried to subdue the Mossi in the

[648] fifteenth century by persuasion, and later by the jihad. Both attempts

[167] failed, but the Moslems finally entered Mossi country as refugees from

they were befriended by the ruler in whose territory they lived. During

[798] certain periods, they were subjected to many restrictions and were forbid-

den by the Mogho Naba to recite their prayers in public places.¹¹ At other

[797] times, they were left free to practice their religion, and even succeeded in

converting several Mogho Nanamse to Islam. Under converts such as Sava-

dogo (ca. 1760), Islam spread into many districts and gave rise to such im-

portant local centers as Sakhaboutenga (Dakay).

771 The Moslems in Ouagadougou were represented at the court by their

795 Imam. This person even received his badge of office—a white turban and

white robe—from the Mogho Naba, and had to swear in the name of Allah

792 and *Nabiyyama* (the prophet Mohammed) to be faithful to him, obey him,

and aid him in times of need. However, he did not have to drink the nam-

tibo as suggested by Dim Delobson; nor did he have to observe such non-

Moslem customs as drinking the millet beer the Mogho Naba provided for

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

Moslems. In return, he gave them millet water sweetened with honey, millet cakes, meat, and kola nuts.

The celebration of the festival in the districts was not as imposing as it was at Ouagadougou, but we have Binger's excellent eyewitness account of the festivities at Sakhaboutenga:

First of all, Boukary sent word that he would like me to accompany him to Sakhaboutenga, where it is his custom to go on the day of the festival. The chief's men spent the entire day attending to preparations: they distributed powder, cleaned guns, tried on harnesses, and polished copper fittings as we would in France on the eve of a great parade. . . . It was an occasion for revelry, and they took full advantage of it. They ate as much as they could, drank a great deal of beer, and fired many rounds of ammunition. . . . In the evening there was a moment of consternation: no one had seen the crescent; however, they consoled themselves by repeating that although it had not been sighted here, it had certainly shown itself elsewhere, and they sat down to drink beer all night long.

Monday, June 11. Early this morning Boukary sent a horseman to Sakhaboutenga to consult the marabouts. The messenger soon returned and assured the chief that the moon will be seen tonight. "All the marabouts have said so." The much-desired crescent appeared for a few moments this evening; shots were fired through half the night, and beer ran in floods. . . .

Tuesday, June 12. From four o'clock in the morning, the tam-tams sounded everywhere, and everyone was busy; it is obvious that this is the eve of an important event. . . . Half an hour after our departure we arrived at Sakhaboutenga. We dismounted and camped under the trees at the entrance of the village. Some Moslems from the neighborhood came, greeted Boukary, and offered him some kola nuts in lots varying from five to eight. But they always held them out in a fold of their robe [it being forbidden for a commoner to hand a gift directly to a chief]. A village nearby sent twelve large jars of beer.

From afar and from all directions, long files of Moslems emerged from the village on their way to the Imam's for prayers. Several onlookers arrived on donkeys from the surrounding countryside. The religious ceremony took place on a flat expanse to the east of the village. It was an impressive spectacle. The crowd was silent. The faithful, ranged in ranks about 30 feet deep, prostrated themselves and rose again in perfect harmony and with awesome slowness. From time to time the voice of the Imam was raised, and his *amina* [amen] was heard with deep reverence.

There were about three thousand persons of both sexes there, almost all of them dressed in white. The *bourrous* [robes], the red tarbooshes, and the multitude of black faces lent to the ceremony the grandiose character of an oriental fete. As soon as the prayers were over, Boukary Naba walked up to the Imam of Sakhaboutenga to the sound of tam-tams to receive his blessing and the good wishes of the Moslems, who wished on my illustrious host many horses and warriors. Boukary Naba ordered that the Imam be given a magnificent sheep and several sheepskins full of cowries. He presents this

184
795
137 796
643
771

634
795
796

771
184

[792]

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

634
795³⁸
796
771
184
gift every year to the Imam and to Karamakho Isa, for whom he has great veneration. These are old and wise men who cannot but give him excellent counsel.¹⁸

The relations between Boukary Koutou and the Moslems of the Sakhaboutenga district show how Mossi chiefs, though pagans, were able to establish viable political bonds with potentially hostile believers of another religion. Boukary Koutou was probably a Moslem "in outward appearance only," as Binger suggests. Nevertheless, it was by being Moslems of this kind that Mossi rulers managed to retain the allegiance of their Moslem subjects. This was their duty as "fathers of their people," and apparently they did it without much hesitation. In this manner, they effectively used religion to bolster their power and sustain their authority.

642
182
[648]
[431]
[613]
[771]
Ritual connections between the Mossi rulers and the chiefs of surrounding countries enabled them to protect their subjects from foreign attack and to maintain internal cohesion. The numerous reciprocal gifts between the Mossi and such other Voltaic groups as the Dagomba, Mamprusi, and Gurmanche were based on the belief in descent from a common ancestor or ancestress. Ritual and the supernatural thus played an extremely important role in the cohesiveness of the Mossi kingdoms and in the functioning of their governmental processes. Without these ritual factors, it is doubtful whether the Mossi rulers would have been able to maintain such a relatively high degree of control over their subjects, given the relative weakness of their economic resources, communications, and armed forces. In trying to understand why the Mossi retained their autonomy for so long, one must take into consideration the statement made by a French officer a [648] [619] year after the Mossi were conquered: "We must not lose sight of the fact that [the Mossi] have always presented a common front to strangers, and that a single word of command is sufficient to unite them against the invader in the name of kinship and national unity."¹⁹

642
648
182
The phase of Mossi political history that began when Nyennega left Dagomba and moved northward came to an end with the European conquest. Most French scholars believe that the Mossi were in a state of decadence at the time of conquest and might have fallen to such African conquerors as El Hadj Omar, Samory Touré, or Baba To. The fact remains, however, that these conquerors all skirted Mossi country without entering it. If these African rulers believed that the Mossi were invincible in their unity, it was because the Mossi, through mythical bonds of common descent and actual bonds of kinship, had welded themselves into a cohesive and powerful group.

THE EUROPEAN CONQUEST

*175

175 Voulet left Ouagadougou in February to establish French control among the Gurunsi, leaving a military commander, Captain Scal, and a Resident Officer at Ouagadougou. But he acted without taking into account the resourcefulness of Wobogo (now once more Boukary Koutou), who had gained the allegiance of chiefs in the Manga area. The Gounga Naba, [645] who was provincial minister for that region, tried to gain the support of the [634] Djiba and Rissouma districts for Mogho Naba Sighiri. He failed, and [669] ordered the troops of Garanse, Nobere, Toise, and Yake districts to attack Boukary Koutou's supporters. In the ensuing battle the Gounga Naba's forces lost nine men, the rebels ten. The Gounga Naba considered these losses too high and called off the fighting.⁴⁴

*175

*648

643

Meanwhile, Boukary Koutou had sent an appeal to Steward, the commander of a British force that was then on its march of conquest through Gambaga and that had designs on Ouagadougou, "for protection in virtue of the treaty concluded with Mr. Ferguson in 1894." Wishing to avoid conflict with the British, Voulet hastened to Tenkodogo in February 1897 to meet Steward, and the two men established boundaries between the French and British spheres of influence. Boukary Koutou was thus left to fend for himself.⁴⁵ Undaunted, he crossed the Gold Coast frontier once more and proceeded toward Ouagadougou. Scal heard about his activities and decided to launch an attack against him. He took Boukary Koutou by surprise in June 1897, and forced him to flee. Boukary passed through Bere district and arrived in the Gold Coast, where he was granted refuge by the British. About a year later, he convinced a Colonel Northcott that he had been unjustly deposed by the French, and that under the treaty of 1894 the British were his protectors and were obliged to restore him to his throne. In May 1898, a British force under Northcott and with Boukary Koutou in tow arrived at Kombissiri, some twenty-five miles from Ouagadougou, but here they were met by French emissaries who brought with them copies of the treaty of protection signed by Sighiri in January 1897. The British troops retreated, taking the dejected ruler with them into permanent exile.⁴⁶ Boukary reportedly settled at Zangoiri, a few miles from Gambaga.⁴⁷ He was forbidden to enter Gambaga because of the tradition that if he ever saw the Gambaga ruler, both of them would die. Boukary never returned to Mossi country. He died and was buried in the Gold Coast in 1904, but his funeral was held at Ouagadougou.⁴⁸

Boukary Koutou is seen in retrospect as a tragic figure, whose main fault seems to have been that he ruled at the most difficult time in his country's history. Judging by his treatment of Binger, he appears to have been a clever politician, but his resources were of no avail against the

[173]

[Pre-World War I Period]

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

monial activities, especially since they were considered interesting "feudal" anachronisms to be shown to visiting officials and travelers. He also retained the power to appoint district chiefs, but the French often vetoed men they disliked and suggested that other candidates be elected. He also lost all control over his provincial administrators. The administrative chain now extended from the cercle commanders, through the provincial ministers and district chiefs, down to the village chiefs. Many provincial ministers, out of loyalty to the traditional system, occasionally briefed the Mogho Naba on the policies the French had ordered them to carry out, and told him about the state of affairs in the districts. This was completely unofficial if not illegal, but it made little difference to the French.

One serious blow to the power of the Mossi chiefs, especially on the district level, was their loss of judicial autonomy. Mossi country was subjected to the Indigénat, a rather harsh code of law for new colonies, which was promulgated by a decree of September 1887. Under this code, administrators could hold summary trials and punish any Moaga, whether chief or commoner. In June 1905, the Mossi chiefs regained some of their judicial power when a supplementary decree established village, district, and cercle courts throughout Haut-Sénégal et Niger.¹⁸ Mossi village chiefs regained their police powers and the right to reconcile disputes among their people, but their decisions could be appealed to a district court. The district chief heard appeals and judged civil and criminal cases, but in all deliberations he was aided by two assessors appointed by the Governor. His judgment could be appealed to a cercle court, which was presided over by a European, who was assisted by two Africans. They heard appeals and judged crimes for which the penalty could be no more than five years. Penalties handed down by this court could be appealed to the Supreme Court of the Federation of French West Africa in Dakar, which judged all major crimes.

Thus the Mossi chiefs did regain part of their judicial power; but because the decree of 1905 did not abolish the Indigénat, local French administrators could easily countermand this power. Moreover, some administrators, dissatisfied with the Mossi courts and possibly resentful at their own loss of judicial power, sent numerous complaints to Dakar about the incompetence of the chiefs and the injustices perpetrated by village and district courts. As a result, a decree of August 1912 abolished the judicial power of the Mossi and of all other African chiefs, and instructed them to refer all litigation to courts at the poste, subdivision, and cercle levels.¹⁹

During the period before the First World War, the Mossi chiefs lost not only their judicial power but also much of the economic and religious basis of their political power. The French administration abolished slavery

159, 175*

177

648*

643

643

175*

177

648*

692

[622]

[625]

[634]

175*

177

648*

[Pre-World War II Period] FA28 Mossi FA28

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

* 164
 175 chiefs did not regain any of their traditional power. They remained auxiliaries of the administration. Taking Mogho Naba Kom as an example, 177
 648 one report states that this "simple, intelligent, compliant man served as 631
 643 news agent and made himself useful to the political administration" until the arrival of Hesling, when he took a livelier interest in the affairs of the colony.³⁴ Another source says of the same monarch:

Free of the ancestral traditions that forbade him to leave his palace, and curious about progress and administration, he travels on all the roads and, under our supervision, busies himself with the settlement of administrative problems, to which he lends the weight of his authority. He makes the proposals for the nomination of province and district chiefs; he encourages his subjects to work and produce. Finally, he fulfills with the greatest dignity the representative functions that devolve upon him at his palace and in the official ceremonies.³⁵

While it is true that the Mogho Naba made proposals for the nomination of chiefs, he was powerless to prevent their dismissal if they incurred the displeasure of the administration—a frequent occurrence during the Hesling period. For example, when the administration deposed Naba Boulga of Doulougou district for "incompetence" and placed him in "enforced residence" in a neighboring district, the French officials encouraged the election of Bila Kongo primarily because he was a former cercle guard. Bila Kongo was assassinated in 1924, and the Mogho Naba named Mahama Ouedraogo to take his place. This new chief soon had difficulties with the administration, however, and was deposed for exacting unauthorized taxes from his subjects and for abusing his authority. Mogho Naba Kom then appointed Ousmane Ouedraogo, but he was deposed for "incompetence" and exiled to Sao district.

* 175 On the other hand, Hesling made few attempts to change the traditional 177
 * 177 political and administrative structures of the Mossi. One contemporary 648
 631 source says:

631 Since its inception the Government of the Upper Volta has made no changes or innovations, or at best very few, in this connection. The native administrative entities in the cercles of Ouagadougou, Ouahigouya, Kaya, and Fada-N'Gourma have remained the same as those which Haut-Sénégal et Niger transferred to the colony in 1919. . . . Only in 1922 did the cercle of Koudougou have its "Gurunsi" districts separated from its "Mossi" districts to form a new province, which was placed under the command of the Léo Naba, 635
 • [634] a chief of the same Gurunsi race. Tenkodogo, a cercle made up of a large number of small districts ruled by thoroughly inept chiefs, has been the object of a partial internal reorganization since the beginning of 1923. The number of its native *circonscriptions* [districts] has been reduced from 82 to 73.³⁶

[Pre-World War II Period]

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

administration, and failed to serve as an administrative training ground for either the Mossi ministers or the commoner representatives."

During the Hesling period, the Mossi district chiefs remained in power, but the French, through their African administrative assistants, kept a stricter watch on district affairs. The chiefs regained some of their judicial (or, rather, conciliatory) power in 1921 when the Governor, dissatisfied with the territory's legal system, promulgated a decree reorganizing the courts and giving the Mossi district and village chiefs the right of adjudication in minor cases involving civil and commercial matters." However, they had to send all cases involving serious crimes and all appeals from other cases to higher courts. Because their subjects could appeal to the subdivision courts and because they risked reprimand by administrators when their verdicts were deemed unjust, many Mossi chiefs complied. They tried to do so even when the litigants themselves would have preferred not to deal with the administrators. Often the chiefs overtly told the litigants to go to the administrators but covertly persuaded them not to do so. In this manner they observed all proprieties toward both the French and their subjects.

The village and district courts had to send all criminal offenses such as assault and battery cases and major thefts, as well as appeals against their verdicts, to a "tribunal of the first degree," which was presided over by a subdivision commander and his Mossi assessors. Cases were taken to the tribunal only when the dispute was extremely serious or when people were gravely injured, because Mossi villagers hesitated to take their cases to officials who, when not swamped with work, had little patience with the complexities of Mossi litigation. Moreover, the Mossi feared to subject their fellows to the rigors of the Indigénat, which was still in existence, because, as one official source declares, "If this regime subsists, it is because the Voltaic populations have not yet reached a level of development that would permit the withdrawal of a weapon which is so readily useful to the commanders of administrative units. Besides, when judiciously managed, it does not present any danger in these underdeveloped regions."

Cases which the subdivision commanders considered too serious for their courts were sent to "tribunals of the second degree" at the cercle level. From there, cases were sent to a "colonial court of appeal," which was presided over by the Chief Officer of Political Affairs of the territory and which could sentence a criminal to three to ten years in prison. More serious crimes carrying longer prison terms or the death penalty were sent up to the Supreme Court at Dakar. Owing in part to the lack of communication between the rural districts and the higher courts, the Mossi

[Pre-World War II Period]

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

were seldom able to follow a case higher than the subdivision level. In cases involving long imprisonment or the death penalty, the relatives of the condemned person usually learned about the sentence through rumors from the capital, but seldom through the administration.

One judicial duty which the administration gave the Mossi chiefs and which they had always disliked was the adjudication of domestic cases. They found such cases even more difficult and distasteful after Hesling issued a circular on "The Condition of the Native Woman," which is summarized in a semi-official report as follows:

[The Governor] is pained to see [the Mossi woman] so often subjected to a special form of slavery which, notably at the time of marriage, reduces her to the role of a domestic animal. Without wishing to interfere with ingrained native traditions, the Governor desires "to prime the desirable evolution by means of judicial decisions." Thus he comes to the decision that in those lawsuits concerning marriage in which formerly the woman was not consulted, she must henceforth be present and must argue the case with her husband. M. Hesling trusts that this procedural reform, which he hopes will give the native woman "a consciousness of her individuality and her rights," will be followed in the courts by further reforms. First of all [the courts] must weaken and then progressively modify those traditions which promote injustice toward women. . . . Questions will no doubt be raised as to whether it is necessary to set up regulations on such matters. However, M. Hesling advises his administrators to adjust [such regulations] to, and apply them with respect for, ancestral traditions. It will be interesting to see the results obtained in this attempt, and to see whether the "moussos" [a malapropism denoting Mossi women] of the Upper Volta will acquire some individuality."

The Mossi chiefs were not told that the Governor's circular recommending a change in the status of women stipulated that traditional practices be taken into account. But even if they had been told, they would not have been impressed, because any fundamental change in the status of women would have placed their whole society in jeopardy. Woman exchange stood at the core of a social, economic, and political nexus that held Mossi society together. True, in pre-conquest times most quarrels and lawsuits were caused by trouble over women, but the marriage system was upheld by all the other institutions. Even after the arrival of the French and the weakening of the chiefs' judicial role, the Mossi could punish violators of the marriage system by imposing social sanctions. They now feared that if the French passed laws giving the women free choice in marriage, and the chiefs had to adjudicate on the basis of these laws, all traditional sanctions would become obsolete. Neither the chiefs nor the Mossi on the Councils of Native Notables nor the elders welcomed any discussion about

16775*

177*

648*

692

[634]

[621]

175*

[77]

648*

562

692

631

[post-world war II period]

* 186

CHIEFS AND POLITICIANS

175

631

647

The present Union has as its aims:

1. To establish an alliance and effective solidarity among its members, and to defend their material and moral interests in the face of all difficulties;
2. To collaborate closely with the economic and social aims of the French administration;
3. To provide aid to the dependents, wives or minor children, of all deceased members of the society. This aid will be obtained:
 - a. by drawing from a special reserve fund;
 - b. by contributions from all members; and
 - c. by an additional subscription according to the circumstances. The total sum to be granted to each family will be set at the annual meetings of the general assembly.

This organization decided to meet annually in Ouagadougou, Ouahigouya, Tenkodogo, and Koudougou. Member chiefs were to be notified of meetings through the existing traditional political hierarchies. Those chiefs who were unable to attend meetings could send a representative.²⁴

*

[648]

Both the politicians and the French administration welcomed the formation of the Union. The politicians saw it as a forum that would support them in elections and to which they could report on their activities on behalf of their constituents. The French officials welcomed the opportunity to meet periodically with the chiefs and to obtain their help and support for official plans and projects.

One of the new administrative policies was to increase the number of administrative units (the cercles, subdivisions, and postes), and to staff them with European civil servants. Mossi country was given one civil servant for every thousand inhabitants. These officials were thus less isolated from the central administration and more directly responsible to their superiors for the areas under their command. Most of them were assisted by young African civil servants, both Mossi and non-Mossi, who kept administrative records, worked in the agricultural extension programs, acted as interpreters and court assessors, and so on. In addition to these administrative assistants, there were usually junior civil servants who were stationed at the homes of the district chiefs. They were called "secretaries," but they actually served as liaison officers between the administrators and the chiefs.

•

[634]

Thus the administrators notified the district chiefs through these secretaries that certain taxes were being levied, and would be collected on a specific date; that certain laws affecting them had been passed; that an election would be held on a certain date; or that they should summon the potential draftees in their district to be examined at a certain time.

The postwar administrators did much more than communicate with the district chiefs through their secretaries. They still had considerable author-

[post-world war II period] FA28 Mossi FA28

CHIEFS AND POLITICIANS

187

ity in local matters, even though the Indigénat had been abolished. They adjudicated minor offenses committed in their territories or referred to them on appeal by the districts and villages. They attempted to settle family quarrels and commercial cases, and ordered that restitution be made in cases of theft. However, they had to send any difficult case or major crime up the hierarchy until it reached the officials authorized to deal with it.

The French administrators also continued to act as intermediaries between the large commercial enterprises in Ouagadougou who wished to recruit men for labor or to buy local produce and enterprises in the larger Mossi towns. Thus, if a private firm in Ouagadougou wanted men to work on the roads, it asked the *chef de poste* (administrator) of a region to tell the district chiefs that its representatives would come to recruit men on a certain date. If a large business was planning to canvass a certain area in order to buy shea nuts, it asked the local administrators to notify the chiefs. No one was ever quite certain whether these activities were legal, but no one questioned them. The *chefs de poste* might simply have been giving the people information that they could not have obtained by any other means.

The Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou, like the supreme chiefs of the other Mossi regions, continued to perform both the administrative role assigned to him by the colonial government and his traditional politico-ceremonial role. He was partly responsible, through his active cooperation with the administration, for the rapidity with which the Upper Volta became a functioning entity. For example, in his anxiety to make his capital worthy of being the territory's administrative center, he gave his full support to the extension of the Abidjan-Bobo-Dioulasso railroad to Ouagadougou. But he always succeeded in giving the impression (to foreigners at least) of detachment and dissociation from the French administration. His behavior was quite different when he functioned as Mogho Naba of the Ouagadougou Mossi. The following is a brief description of a visit he made to one of the districts:

The Mogho Naba arrived unexpectedly at the district chief's headquarters, where no preparations had been made for his visit. It appears that he was on a tour of his domains to consult with the local chiefs about the forthcoming elections, and had simply dropped in to visit the district chief. However, as soon as his presence became known around the district, important village chiefs and the heads of lineages all put on their robes and appeared to pay homage to him. Meanwhile, he was consulting with his host. But as soon as the conversation was over he came out into the compound, where he was saluted by the chief's Bendere, who praised the royal ancestors by reciting

[post-world war II period]

* 188

CHIEFS AND POLITICIANS

175 their genealogies and traditions. The Mogho Naba was pleased by the recitation and thanked the drummer.

643

634 Later that day, the Mogho Naba presented himself in the courtyard of the district chief's compound to be saluted by the village chiefs and by the heads of lineages. They came to him in the traditional way, rubbing their palms and bending their foreheads to the ground. He addressed them, and in response they snapped their fingers in the customary manner. Then, one by one, the village chiefs and the lineage elders came to their monarch and gave him presents of money which ranged from 50 to 200 francs. The Mogho Naba paid little attention to the sums given, being more interested in this act of homage and fealty. However, he listened carefully as each donor announced his name and rank within the official hierarchy of the village. He later thanked them collectively and departed. This ceremony, while not very elaborate, differed little in detail from those characteristic of the traditional Mossi's relationship to their Mogho Naba. The new element here was that the monarch was traveling around his domain, establishing a close relationship with his chiefs and subjects, whose support he needed for his modern political alliances.²⁸

574

182

* 175

643

796

182

[692]

The Mogho Naba continued to hold the morning ceremony at court, even though it was rapidly losing its traditional function and becoming of major interest only to visitors. He also continued to hold those ceremonies associated with individual appointments to the nam and with traditional sacrifices. Unknown to many was the fact that traditional authorities at court still judged legal cases which many Mossi refused to take to the Europeans.

* 175

645

182

In contrast to the Mogho Naba, the traditional provincial ministers now lost most of the power they had held in the pre-conquest period, and all the duties they had acquired in the immediate post-conquest era. As we have seen, one minister, the Baloum Naba, had entered politics at the suggestion of the Mogho Naba, but even he was now relegated to the entourage that accompanied the Mogho Naba and the European administrators on visits to the ministers' former provinces. The increased number of European administrators had made these ministers superfluous.

* 178

175

554

634

[692]

The district chiefs retained some prestige after the war. They could still judge legal cases, with the understanding that the litigants were free to go to the Europeans if they so desired and had to be sent there in serious cases. Their major problem was that a more efficient administration was taking greater interest in district affairs. For the first time since the conquest, officials were visiting some of the more remote villages. No longer were they said to "act as locusts"—that is, to appear periodically to garner supplies and men from the districts and then disappear until the next onslaught. Instead, they appeared regularly to collect taxes and to take censuses, and

[post-world war II period]

CHIEFS AND POLITICIANS

they were kept informed of almost everything that occurred in the districts by their secretaries and "friends" (usually war veterans who visited the administrative headquarters on business).

Not all the district chiefs accepted with equanimity their gradual loss of power. Many of them had accepted at face value the joyful refrain of the elite and the politicians that the "land was cooling"—i.e., that the rigors of colonialism were over. They welcomed the liberal laws of 1946, and believed that they would regain the power lost by their fathers. Thus, they were among the most surprised persons in the Upper Volta when the easing of colonial rule brought with it more French supervision rather than less. From the standpoint of political power, most district chiefs had been better off in the days of the "locusts." At least the locusts came and went, whereas progressive government slowly but irrevocably eroded their power.

The village chiefs, as those members of the traditional Mossi hierarchy who had the closest contact with the people, felt the postwar administrative changes much more keenly than the other chiefs. They found it increasingly difficult to deal with war veterans, adherents of formal religions, and other people who had lost respect for traditional values and practices.²⁰ Whereas few Mossi would have refused to visit or to pay allegiance to the Mogho Naba or to their district chief, with whom they had little personal contact, many did refuse to have political relationships with those village chiefs whom they neither liked nor respected.

The rural Mossi, upon whom the position of the Mogho Naba and his chiefs ultimately depended, did not fully comprehend the postwar changes in the Upper Volta, and were initially willing to look to their chiefs for guidance. Most of them referred to their newly won civil rights in the French Union by what they called *soguem minga*, which may be translated as "possession of one's self," "liberty," or "liberation." To the majority of them, however, the reforms meant chiefly the end of forced labor. They were more than willing to leave the new political affairs to their chiefs, despite the assurance of the elite that they could now participate in the governmental processes. Dupont wrote in a romantic vein about the introduction of political reforms in the Upper Volta:

Can we truly speak of a change for the better in this country? Yes! A page has been turned, the last in a chapter. A new chapter has just begun, and I was the amazed witness of this beginning. . . . One must say, in France's favor, that she did not merely engage in beautiful speeches, but that her liberating decrees deeply modified the life of the natives. Gone is the export of laborers; gone are the uncontrolled prestations; gone the requisitions of produce which the peasants had to buy elsewhere at a higher price and resell at a loss; gone the sales in which the collective price given to the district

[post-world War II period]

CHIEFS AND POLITICIANS
 As the politicians grew skillful at the game of metropolitan politics, their power increasingly eclipsed that of their chiefly benefactors and of local French administrators. For example:

A local chef de poste summoned the district chiefs to bring their potential draftees for the war in Algeria early in the morning on a specific date to be examined by medical officers. Those chiefs who looked upon any summons with a trepidation born of their past experience with prewar administrators, arrived at the headquarters as early as 5:30 A.M. on the morning in question, bringing their young men with them. Many of these chiefs, whose only means of transportation was their slow-moving ceremonial horse, spent the night en route to be there at dawn. More sophisticated chiefs coming from similar distances left on the same morning and arrived at about 8:00 A.M., the hour when the administrator himself was first seen stirring in his residence. One chief, a war veteran, rode up on his bicycle at about 8:45 A.M. in a most unchiefly manner and became the butt of jokes from the other waiting chiefs. Another district chief, who was an elected representative, did not arrive until about 9:30 A.M., and he was greeted on arrival by the administrator. This man had only about half a mile to travel, and he did so in his car. His colleagues greeted him with a mixture of jokes, feigned awe, and surprise, and some of them addressed him as "Mogho Naba" and "Governor."

Another example of the shift in the balance of power was the relationship that developed between Joseph Conombo and the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou. The Mogho Naba had nominated and supported Conombo as a candidate for deputy to the National Assembly. He was elected, and later became Secretary of the Interior in the Mendès-France Government of 1954. He thus had access to power undreamed of by the Mogho Naba. Being a Moaga as well as a good politician, he never flaunted his authority before his traditional chief; nor did the Mogho Naba try to exercise his traditional powers over him. But their behavior toward each other clearly demonstrated that they were both aware of the shift in power, even though they were both too wise and too polite to make an issue of it.

Other political forces also jeopardized the position of the chiefs. For example, as head of the Union Voltaïque, Conombo had an honored position within a Paris-based African parliamentary group called the Indépendants d'Outre-Mer (IOM). He would have held an even more important position within this group if he had had wider support among the non-Mossi in the Upper Volta. But his power was limited by the presence and competition of the MDV, which, while Mossi-supported, was anti-chief; the Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution Africaine (MPA), an anti-Mossi and anti-RDA party formed in 1954 by Nazi Boni of the Bobo ethnic group and supported by some officials in the administration; and the Parti Démocratique Voltaïque (PDV), a local branch of a now less radical RDA